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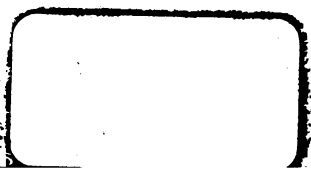
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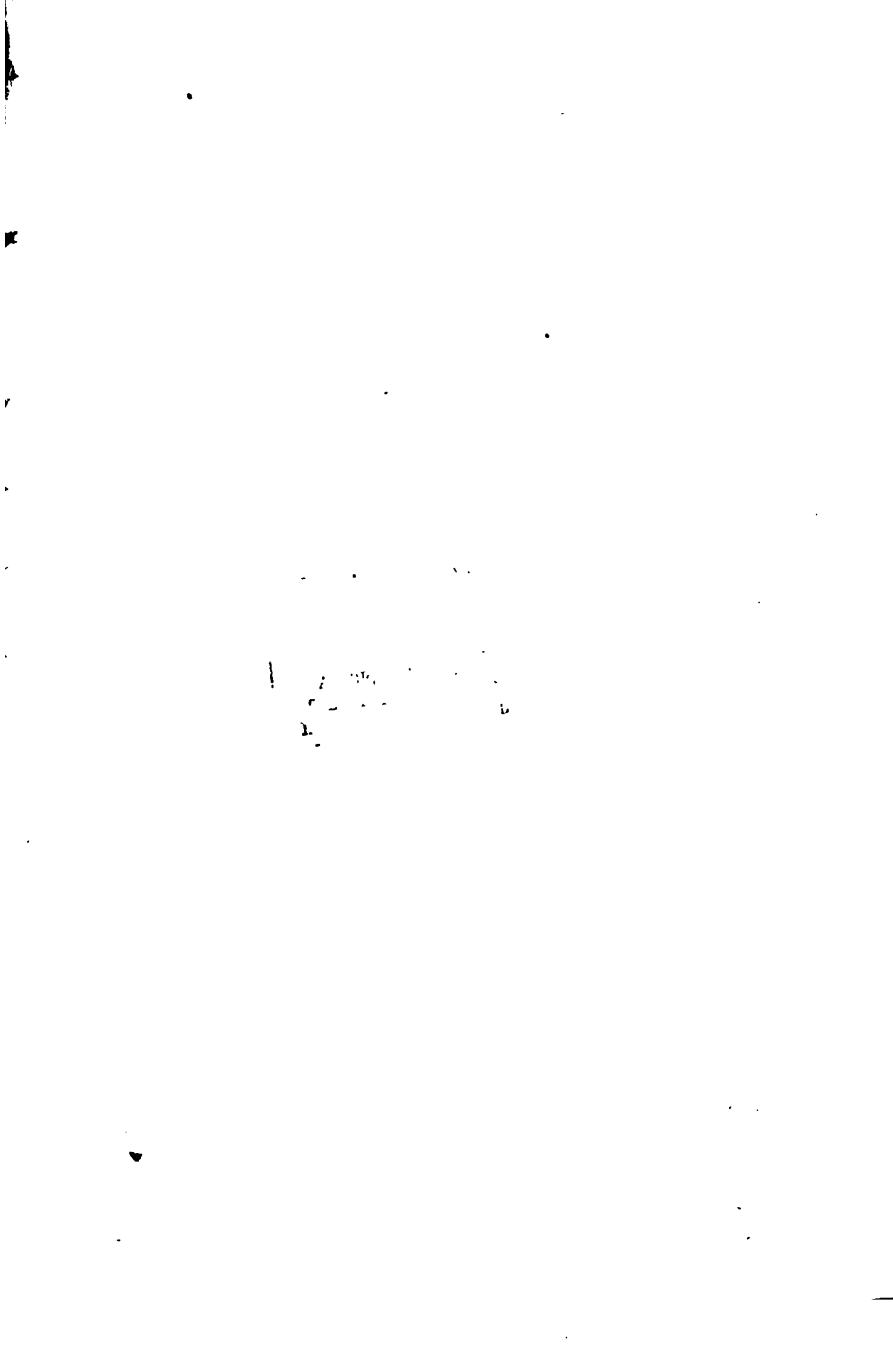


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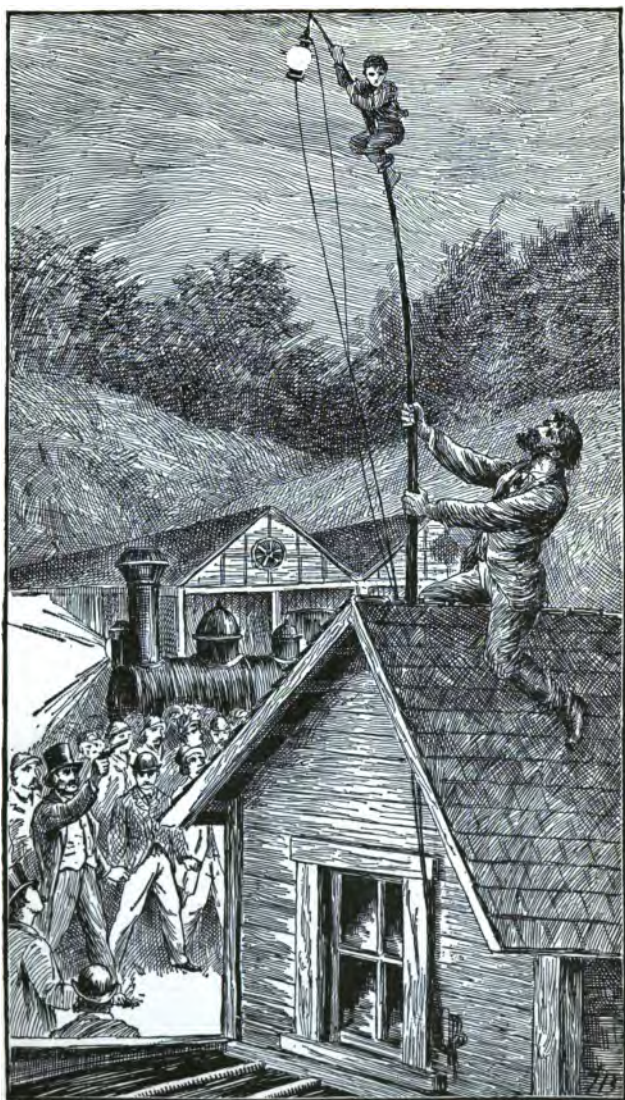












**"HANDS OFF THAT MAST! INDUCE THAT LAD TO DESCEND BY KIND WORDS IF POSSIBLE!"**

# TOM THE READY;

OR,

## UP FROM THE LOWEST.

By RANDOLPH HILL.

ILLUSTRATED.



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# TOM THE READY.

## CHAPTER I.

### A HUNGRY BOY.



PLEASE, sir, give me a supper?" pleaded a little voice at the carriage-wheels as I halted before the railway-station at the village of St. Albans, Vermont.

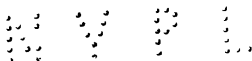
"Well, my lad, run into the lunch-room and buy what you want," I replied, tossing him some small change.

"You wait here, sir, and I'll come out and show you what I get, and how hungry I am. When you see me eat you'll know I didn't lie to you," was the reply as he sprang eagerly toward the doors through which the broad flare of the night lights poured out into the gloom.

"But I say, young chap, I did not accuse you of deception."

"No, sir, yet most men would, and do, when I ask, and I had rather go hungry than to be called a liar—that is, almost, I would," and he was gone through the pretentious entrance of the small village station.

I was awaiting the arrival of the Montreal express, by which some tourist friends were expected to arrive to pass a few days with me at my summer home. The horses pounded the earth with restless feet as the flies, born of August heat, spurred and stung them, the



heavens were full of sultry clouds that promised no rain and betokened a stirless atmosphere of breathless discomfort.

Thinking to amuse the long hour I had to fill up, the train being behind time, with an idle curiosity only I fear, I determined to draw the boy out when he should return. From so trivial an incident I became involved in this net-work of a life-history, years ago.

"Here I am you see, sir," rang out the cheery voice again at the curb, as the lad opened his bundle and begun hungrily gnawing a chicken-bone. In truth he was almost famished, one would have said to watch him.

"Who are you?"

"Me? I'm Tom the Ready."

"No, no. What's your real name?"

"Thomas Seacomb, sir. My father lives up by the railroad; he's out of work. He don't drink, if you're thinking of that. Father's sort of discouraged like. You see, mother's run away with Eph Jowles, the hack-driver, and took my little sister with her. You read about it, didn't you? No? I s'posed everybody knew. Yes, sir, run away. I don't hate her, but I don't love anybody who don't treat me well."

"Would you like to see her?"

"I don't think I would; but if I knew where my little sister was I'd go and see her. You see father takes on about her dreadful, being brought up by a bad mother."

"Does your father provide for you?"

"You mean feed me, and all that? Why no. You see father mopes, as I call it. Some say he's cracked—crazy, you know. You see, we don't belong to this town now—are not citizens here, you know," said the



little fellow with sapient air, "and so we belong in the poor-house down in Acton."

"The poor-house!"

"Yes, sir. But father wouldn't stay, 'cause he used to work in the railroad shops up here. He's big enough to run away, but I'm afraid I am not, though I've been here three days looking after father."

After a moment's pause the handsome little fellow added pensively:

"Father will go up by the cottage on one of the streets here, and stand, and stand, looking at it among the bushes and trees, saying to me:

"'That's where you was born! Ain't it a pretty home?' over and over again.

"When I'm here I pull him away. 'Taint no use to be looking at what hurts you, is it? Mother might have better killed him almost, I think."

"Well, now, my child, you have run away from the poor-farm. What next?"

He dashed the brown curls back from his brow, casting the greasy cap to the ground with a stamp of the foot, responding:

"Anything to earn an honest livin', and escape from that place! It must be that the God who made a little fellow like me has some interest in me, and a place for me. I've thought of that, lying by the attic window nights looking at the stars. You see there's a preacher comes up to the school-house at the Four Corners once in four weeks. But perhaps you don't take stock in such things," observed the boy, not certain about the religious sentiments of his auditor, though I had said nothing. "Old Hill, that's the keeper, he don't believe in anything, except the devil."

Just then the boy turned toward the glare that flashed from the head-light of a switching engine which fell in a long line adown the yard.

"There he is now!" yelled the little voice, and its owner disappeared like a swift shadow.

I turned, not a little startled by the piercing terror of the child's cry, and sure enough there were two forms creeping along toward the rear of my coach half-revealed by the tell-tale light. One of them sprang to the bit of the off-horse, while the other approached the carriage step, exclaiming angrily:

"Where's that boy?"

I saw that he was an officer of the village police, and simply replied:

"Tell that old scoundrel to release my horses, or I'll cover him, and render him up for assault in the highways!"

"You have been aiding a pauper to escape," roared the fellow at the horses' heads. "That boy's sent to me for correction, bein' a vagrant, and better'n State is the kind law you have helped him to slip."

"You old dunce!" cried I, "be careful how you accuse me till you know the facts. Take your hands off that horse, or I'll not answer for the consequences." At the same time I gave the old coachman a thrust with my foot, which he understood. Lifting the whip, as if to correct my beast, the most spirited, not to say my stable, he lashed her with a—"you stand!"

His figure, stung to madness, fairly stood erect. His hands and feet, trembling with the insult of the blow, lifted the great farmer like a toy, clear from the ground, and with a jerk, tossed him at full length, with a dull thud, upon the stones.



I knew her next move would be to tread upon him, according to her vicious habit; and hence in an instant, was at the man's side, with a lap-robe flouting toward the mare. The coachman drew her in. I helped the man to his feet, fortunately not seriously injured; and as his bruises were a fair punishment, I begun, in a quiet tone, as if of reconciliation, to say:

"Come, now, my friend, be reasonable, and tell me what I have done to offend you in merely conversing with a poor boy, to whom I gave a supper. I never saw him before, and have no idea where he has gone."

He begun in an excited way to reply at length. It was for the interest of tiny Tom's escape that I listened patiently, consuming as much time as possible; though I confess that the crowd of idlers about this time was not at all to my taste, and wished myself well out of the whole scene.

I think I should have succeeded in detaining the pur-  
 for a ten minutes of precious time, had not the  
 the point and hurried the garrulous old fel-  
 low away. But that I could have been justified in an  
 illegal impediment of arrest, save that human laws are  
 not always perfect, and no human man could have  
 doubted that a tender child would be better off almost  
 anywhere else than under the control of that coarse  
 almshouse keeper, where the blue town  
 authorities had placed him.

But the officer had by this time  
 and thoughtless boys in the search-  
 ten, a quiet spectator left behind aw-  
 It  
 was impossible, however, for me to  
 spectator, as the noisy searchers ran lib-  
 of curs hither and thither; yet it was difficult to see just

how a law-abiding citizen could interfere for the runaway's real profiting. As they scurried about freight-house and yard, peeping into empty cars, down into a pit of the turn-table, under platforms, down by fences and walls, I am not ashamed to confess that I sat, mingling prayers to God with all sorts of plans for the lad in the future. It had begun to be evident that the pack had lost the scent. I snapped my watch with the thought that in five minutes more my friends would be due, when a small wretch of a boot-black, who realized no more than that the chase was good fun—as it seems he and Tom had had a tussle that afternoon at the steamboat dock in which Tom had worsted him—cried out from the top of a freight car:

“Here he is, cap, lyin’ flat.”

Instantly there was a rush, with three or four lanterns. But, as Tom ran along the car in the yellow light there was something so plucky in his air, and even beautiful in that boyish face, one small child alone against so many, that to the honor of human nature nearly everybody changed sides at once and became his friends. The police, the keeper, and one or two big fellows influenced by promised reward, still pursued him. They were almost upon him, surrounding the car, when with a bound Tom gained the roof of the adjacent freight depot, running up its sloping sides with perfect ease. A hundred voices now shouted directions to the little hero, enough to confuse a less self-possessed mind; women poured out from the ladies' waiting-room, eager lookers-on, waving handkerchiefs as they followed him with interrupted vision, such as weird lanterns, headlights, and opened furnace-doors of locomotives gave.

I was sure it was a bad move to gain that roof, from

whence it seemed impossible to escape, and standing by this time among its most excited spectators I so far forgot myself as to shout:

"Tom, that was a blunder!"

The brave fellow at once replied, as if reassured by my words, and counting me a friend:

"I am afraid so, sir; but I tell you and all the people that I'd rather die than go back to be beaten by Hil Greggs. Look here!" and he whipped off his ragged jacket to show us great welts upon the tender white skin of his back, which the keeper had given him a week before, as he spoke.

It was a pitiful spectacle, half-distinguished in the dim light at such a distance even. To recall that sight, after all these years, makes me burn.

At this moment Greggs himself emerged from a dormer-window in the roof, his red shock of hair scarcely more deeply colored than his flaming face, fairly furious by this time, and utterly indifferent to the cries of "shame! shame!" which rose on every side from the well-dressed passengers below. It was evident that the pursuer was an adept in roof-climbing also, with his great claw-like fingers thrust under the shingles, his splay feet planted firmly down, his long, angular body presenting a ridiculous attitude to us below, he crawled on all fours nearer and nearer to the ridge-pole, where sat the boy astride. It was slow and cautious work, and it afforded abundant time for such a storm of maledictions to rain upon him from the indignant crowd that a less sensitive man would have retreated in dismay before the popular fury he had provoked. Still the man had the semblance of law on his side, and what stood him in better stead, a bad, angry heart, bent on revenge.

He would soon have his victim, and be out of town with him, when our indignation might waste itself upon the wind.

As he crept nearer to his prey, who sat wordless and unresolved, we thought, an engineer could not resist the temptation presented by this conspicuously presented attitude of person. Since I am telling this story as the facts transpired, I am not responsible for the seeming indelicacy of the incidents at this point. The engineer grasped a hose used for spraying the coal, turned the cock and sent the full head of cold water straight against the presented angle of the climber. It was like a deluge! Shrieks of derisive laughter from the spectators told how good a hit in every respect had been made, while we made haste to shelter ourselves or otherwise evade the returning shower from the dripping eaves. I could see Tom laughing in the general glee and clapping his little hands at the imminent risk of losing his hold.

But while for a moment the poor-house keeper seemed disconcerted, the danger of falling nerved him to go on, and through the splash and coruscation of the shower he pressed his way clean up to the peak, fairly out of the stream now, and soon, astride the saddle-boards on either side, was working his way toward Tom.

We gave up all hope for the boy now, of course, and begun to think what we might do when the two came to the ground. Of course, also, we knew that for the present at least we could do nothing whatever. Ladies and gentlemen were saying, "Too bad!" "Outrageous!" and the like. But breath and words amounted to nothing. We had all been hoping that the lad might elude his captors, when an effort to search him out on the morrow

might lead to a change in the little pauper's whole life. But it was all over now.

Not so! It was wonderful, the frenzy of fear which impelled that child. At the gable-end stood a signal-pole, even then seemingly swaying with its burden of a red light high at the truck, so frail was it. Tom circled round it and begun to climb! It bent under his weight like a green bough. It swayed the boy back and forth, sometimes clear past the roof, when, if it had snapped, he must have fallen fifty feet to the gridiron of tracks. Scores of throats now fairly pleaded with him to retreat. It was really becoming one of the most thrilling incidents I had ever experienced; and up here, indeed, in this country railway station at that. To add to the peril, the belated express might at any moment come plunging into the careless and unobservant throng, and directly beneath the suspended boy. Luckily, it was even more belated than we supposed.

"Tom," I cried, "come down! It will not hold you."

"No, sir," floated out the plaintive voice between exhausted breaths. "I'll go to the stars first—that's Heaven!"

No one of us will ever forget that reply. If there be living witness on the earth who reads these lines, let him answer how surprisingly beautiful it seemed. Whence had that beggar-boy such thoughts? How deep is the human soul when deeply stirred, that the grandest dreams show forth, even in the untutored and unloved. In the hush that fell over us, wherein we all held our breath, a sweet-faced lady at my side, whose eyes were full of tears, in the folds of whose skirts a little girl hid herself as she stood gazing, begun quoting those priceless words older than our own childhood and stronger

than all fears: "Verily, I say unto you that in Heaven their angels—the angels set to guard the infancy of our race—do always behold the face of my Father. That is," continued she, "they are within God's readiest call and swiftest dispatch, these guardian angels of children, facing the Throne."

Does that little girl remember the scene, living anywhere upon this footstool, and by chance falling upon this record by an old man of her mother's speech?

Even Jehial Greggs was aghast for an instant. But the man seemed mad. In a moment more he grasped the foot of the mast as if with an intention of thrusting it over with its living burden, as he could easily have done. The fugitive would not surrender, of that we all felt certain. What splendid material was there for a successful career in life; that pluck, coolness, courage, indomitable resolution; if only directed well by right principles and lofty aims! Here was a deadlock. Of course Greggs could not climb the staff; the boy would not descend. It might last the night through, the next day, till the town had assembled to see the boy fall fainting off, or the brute might be hauled down by a mob.

The derision of the spectators soon pricked the wretch into decision, and he actually seemed at least to be nerved up for murder, though we may judge the man too harshly. He was about to lay both strong hands to the task of breaking the pole, as we thought, when a gentleman from the platform, old, with white hair and mustache, called out:

"Look down here, my man."

We all turned to look at least. Probably Greggs did also. The gleam of a revolver in an outstretched hand, covering the keeper, met our eyes,



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"Hands off that mast!"

Greggs obeyed as if paralysis had struck him.

"Go back, you old coward, away from that pole and induce that lad to descend by kind words and proper means, if possible!"

The fellow obeyed, save that he said nothing, being incapable of kind words and daring not to use others.

But the interposition was too late. The slender stick, loaded with the double burden of its heavy signal lights and the lad, bent, bowed, snapped! A groan of horror went up from all. There were hurrying feet and searching hands enough now of a kindlier purpose than had pursued poor Tom before.



## CHAPTER II.

### A RIDE FOR LIBERTY.



LL RIGHT, like a cat which always falls upon its feet!" exclaimed the hearty voice of a man out of the darkness. It proceeded, as I soon found, from the direction of the locomotive standing upon a switch, and its owner was the same eager partisan who had fought the common enemy with the hose. I was soon at his side, and there was Tom just in the act of being straightened out with a kindly shake from among the soft heaps of coal, which was of the consistency of black, moist sand.

It seems that the pole had acted like a whip-stock as it broke, sending the little creature of all sorts of fortune clear past all danger, a flying descent of many feet, into a bed of safety, as unharmed as if he had been handed into a maternal apron-spread.

The officer now appeared, and, to his credit be it said, with a glow of appreciation for "such pluck" on his honest face, and a pleasant word on his tongue, took Tom in charge. There was no help for it, I knew at once. But I said within myself:

"To-morrow, to-morrow. There is another day, Keeper Greggs, if you and I both live; and there are laws with many a turn."

Just here, too, sounded the long whistle of the approaching train. The crowd scattered hither and thither; particularly as the station-agent, with frantic gesture, was bawling an alarm made the more necessary

by some disarrangement of regulations in the loss of his signal lights on the fallen gable pole.

The hundred friendly hands of an hour ago were busy shaking other hundred hands in welcome or farewell; not one was outstretched for Tom. The favor of a crowd is to be as little valued as its cowardly threats are to be feared. The love and hate of the multitude are both alike of small account.

I soon became occupied with my expected guests, and our joyous greetings quite shut out the pity for the friendless lad so late exciting me.

God never forgets, is never too busy to care for His creatures. Your best earthly friend, at this very moment when you suppose him attending to some precious errand of your trust, has forgotten it, so busy is he with his own pressing affairs, honest fellow that he is.

We were about to drive away when Greggs emerged from the station with Tom at his side. The heavy cow-hide boots clattered on, and the little bare feet pattered obediently whither they were led. A miserable farm vehicle was, I now saw, waiting at the curb; two fine young horses, the wretched harness spliced with ropes, fodder in bags and in tumbled masses of litter; a board seat, on which sat a frowzy, hungry-looking youth, upon his mouth a broad grin of satisfaction that seemed cruel as he caught sight of Tom and the keeper. They were evidently to drive to the poor-farm in the neighboring town that night.

"Tom, my boy," I cried, "come here a moment. Mr. Greggs," I added, "I will be responsible for him for five minutes; let him come to my carriage-door."

Greggs was too much cowed by recent occurrences to deny me, though his hard eyes never left us; he could not overhear our words, however.

"Well, they have you this time. But I will not forget you if you only prove worthy to be remembered and to be assisted."

"Worthy means worth, don't it? What am I worth in this world, anyway?" replied Tom in a plaintive tone of angry despair.

Again he surprised me with his thoughtful mood as well as with the discrimination in the use of words. Was this a young philosopher?

"Do you read?"

"Yes, sir; I read all the papers, and books I can get."

"You are about fourteen years old, are you not? Yes, I thought so; and small at that. But your face shows it. Have you ever been at school?"

"No, sir; but there is a dear young lady who comes to the preachin' meetin's I told you of at the Four Corners. She made a Sunday-school out of five of us down there. She had to commence with me in readin' and spellin'. I hain't got to religion yet. I'm in the preparatory," added he, with great care, as he approached so long a word.

"How often does this good little miss meet you?"

"Once in two weeks, sir, after the man has done his preachin'. Her mother's the real teacher."

"Well, be patient. Obey Greggs in everything, then he will have no excuse for treating you ill. There is a legal way of getting you free. Meanwhile I'll see what can be done for your unhappy father."

"Will you? Oh, sir, God bless you for that. But——"

"Well, what more? Speak out."

"I shall be pounded most to death for what's happened to-day, and—and——"

"Well, out with it, my lad."

"I shall be shut up in the *dark hole*."

"What's that?"

"It's the attic, sir."

"Have you ever been there?"

"Been there!" And the boy shuddered from head to foot as he repeated the words, adding nothing further. At length, pushing his soiled face through the carriage-door, and close up to mine, he whispered:

"I was kept there two nights once. The fool—you know they have idiots at the poor-house sometimes—the fool was shut up there with me, because he put onions in the milk-pans. And I heard some one callin', callin' all night, from up in the rafters, and I saw somethin' white on a horse——"

"Pshaw! boy, you are too sensible to believe in ghosts. There never was such a thing. Only fools see ghosts. Come now—it was the idiot who saw and heard all this, was it not?"

"Why, yes; he saw it first, and I was kind of excited, and my head got hot, and I am not a very big fellow, you know, and that fool was huggin' me, and laughin' and yellin', 'See there! It's after you!' till I saw it, too. And then, sir, I had been whipped till I was sick."

"For what had you been whipped?"

"Why, it was no great thing. You see I fastened a rye-straw into the key-hole of the north outside door, so that it moaned and whistled under Greggs' chamber window all night."

"Come on, now, you young scamp!" bellowed the impatient Greggs at this point. "We've miles enough to drive to-night without waitin' here. D'ye hear?"

"Good-night, my boy. You are Tom the Ready, you said. Be faithful to what you know is right as near as you can. Remember that I am your friend, and will never rest till I see you out of that place; and, my brave child, may God help you!"

Our road was the same as far as my own residence. I instructed my coachman to keep behind Greggs' team, and as the latter drove spirited colts to "break" them, as is the habit of farmers, we were soon bowling along at a good pace.

I felt sure that Tom the Ready would not go to that dark hole in the poor-house garret without another effort for liberty. I could see the boy wedged in between the other two upon the seat, and as we once slowly walked the animals up a hill, I saw that Tom's feet were naked of his miserable shoes. The feet were as dexterous as some people's hands. We drew nearer. He had actually tied a rope halter in a tangle of knots about one of Greggs' monstrous boots. I was sure now of something in the wind. We had just emerged upon a straight stretch of road about a mile long. A watering-trough halted them for a moment, when, with a bound like a squirrel, Tom sprung to the back of the off horse and slapped that famous black cap of his across the animal's cheek. With a powerful bound the creature had snapped the string-tangled harness, and was away down the road like the wind.

"Bravo! Hurra!" cried the ladies in our party.

With a curse Greggs rose to his feet, when his fetter sent him sprawling like a clothes-pin across the wheel.

"Never mind me, Josh!" he roared. "Slip the traces, and follow with the other horse!"

Then twisting himself loose, he turned to us:

"Your precious scamp of a boy has gone off on what he calls his colt. He can do anything he pleases with that mare. She's a thoroughbred. He thinks she belongs to him because he found her astray on the mountain and nobody ever called for her. But how can a pauper, and a boy at that, own anything? I tell you the rascal means to steal her."

I made no reply, but looked with all my eyes as down the moonlit highway sped the two coursers. We left Greggs in his useless cart, fairly speechless with rage, and hurried on to keep in sight of the exciting race.

The big fellow, called Josh, was by no means poorly mounted. Vermont is the place for good horses, and every farmer has a good one. Old "Green Mountain Morgan" stock is as plenty in every pasture as leaves in a forest. For endurance, combined with speed, no finer breed can be found in the country; while for beauty they are by all means unsurpassed. The broad, full chest and neck, the short, strong back, copious mane and tail, limbs generous and tapering to a finger-clasp at the ankle; yet their peculiar beauty is in the face—of utmost intelligence to be found in the brute creation.

Away! away! How they flew on before us. We have lost them now, at a turn of the road. No, there they are on the brow of the next hill. We are soon there, and cannot see them. We are two good miles from the water-trough of the start, and near my own gate. About to turn from the highway though the arch the lodge-keeper cries out:

"There was a fellow on horseback going like——"

"Only one? Did you not see two?"

"There was only one passed here," replied my man.

"Depend upon it," said my friend, "your Tom has

leaped a fence somewhere, and is taking a back track. His horse would enable him to."

Depositing my guests at the carriage portico, I stepped out into the lawn to caution the groom about feeding my own panting animals while so warm. He was a new man. I thought I saw it—yes, like an antelope, Tom's chestnut came over the hedge, her white feet striking the sod as softly as a lady's hand. Tom halted under a huge maple, concealed from the distant highway. I walked directly to him.

"Well, my little hero, now put up for the night. You have done enough to rest."

"No, sir. It would never do for me to be found here on your premises."

I saw at once that the boy was right and more ready of wit than I. I should be technically guilty of harboring a horse-thief; though by Greggs' own words it was clear that the horse belonged to Tom, except that its "keeping"—feed and care—had been supplied by the town farm.

"Well, what will you do now?"

"If Josh don't double on me I shall take to the mountain. The mare and I can live there this summer weather. It will not be the first time I have been off with her, will it, Breeze?"

And he patted her lovingly on the neck, putting his arms close about her shapely neck as if she was his dearest friend. Breeze put her silken black nose round, her nostrils flaming scarlet and swelling with her recent excitement, and touched the boy's forehead for all the world as tender as a maiden's kiss.

"You see, sir, she and I are on good terms. Father and she are all I have in the world; and the law would

not allow me Breeze, I suppose. Why, I've many a time gone out nights, when I had bad dreams, and the men were quarrelin' in the great chamber, and slept in the manger at Breeze's head. Once I was with her five days on the hills. That's when I first tried to run away. See here."

With that Tom locked his heels about the horse's neck and hung suspended down, while the animal then lowered her head as the boy gently slid to the ground. Tom then caught her about the neck when she tossed him with a haughty motion so that in a trice the boy was on her back again. Dismounting he commanded the horse to lie down, which was instantly done and up again at his command.

"When we ran away," Tom begun, "the time I just mentioned, in the hills, Breeze was better than a watch-dog. I lived in a cave, and that colt would hear a foot-step in the night and whinny softly like to wake me up. I can show you how she'll speak."

"Why, Tom, she's as good as a trick-horse."

"Better, sir. I've been to the circus, but you see my mare is young and not all pounded out by so many fellows' hands on her. Then, too, nobody can get any of these tricks out of her but me. You try it. Say speak, Breeze."

I did so and failed, of course. Had I supposed the animal would have obeyed, my caution would have led me to decline; for I yet feared that fellow Josh, who might be retracing his steps along the highway. Tom was not so cautious; before I could warn him he cried out:

"Breeze, are you hungry?"

The sharp whinny had hardly rung out upon the air



when hoofs came clattering over the stone hill at the gate-way and down the drive.

"Quick, Tom," I whispered. But the boy needed no further word. Mounting with a touch, he was away. The drive was occupied by his pursuer, and in the outer road I was sure I saw Greggs himself; he had probably borrowed a ride with some farmer. Straight as an arrow Breeze went toward the hedge. Josh saw the intent and turned after across the lawn. Greggs ran, whip in hand, down the outer hedge. The horse would have made it at a bound, but as she settled for the plunge, an open drain by the flower-beds, softened by the recent flooding, slumped in. The noble creature plunged, toppled and fell backward into the moist earth, the brave little rider, unhurt I felt sure, but rolled in the sod wet with the dews of a summer evening.

## CHAPTER III.

### TO THE POOR-HOUSE.



WELL, MY fine fellow," exclaimed Greggs, with a profane and bitter laugh, "this time we shall insist on seeing yer hum," and he grasped Tom about the waist with his long arms, like the coil of an anaconda, fairly lifting the little fellow from the ground and to his side, as a school-boy tucks a book under arm. Both were soon in the vehicle by which Greggs had been accommodated, and returning to "tackle up" his own go-cart at the watering-trough, Josh led Breeze and rode his own spent beast. For my own part I contented myself with one short word as I stepped into the moonlight.

"Mr. Greggs, stop one moment."

He brought the horse to a stand-still, turning a savage though speechless look on me.

"I have only to say that I give notice of an intention of applying to the selectmen of your town for that boy's services and keeping. I shall be at your farm some time on the morrow. If Tom has the mark of a single blow upon him, I shall hold you to account. That's all. Good-night."

I was fearful that the speechless rage of the man would otherwise half-kill the lad before the journey's end. Greggs said not a word, but rode away under the shadow of the great elms.

Of this ride I knew nothing, when the next morning, with a party of friends, we set off to the village of

Acton, where I expected to find the proper authorities of the township. It was noon before finishing consultation with an attorney, and through him securing the necessary papers whereby "the boy, Thomas Seacomb, was rendered into my employ and responsibility for the entire discharge of the town of Acton of his bread and board hereafter forever."

Vexed by delays, of which law is so fruitful, we were in no patient humor when at two o'clock we drove into the yard of the almshouse on Buzzard's Hill. The gloomy old house, the red paint of years ago weather-beaten and dim, frowned down upon one of the wildest landscapes, beautiful and grand in the soft tints of a summer afternoon, that I had ever seen.

The great Green Mountains stood like sentinels on every side save one, and the vista of the west, if one were only on the peak of yonder verdant cove, must include Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks sixty miles away. Everything was beautiful in nature. But the grim, ancient gables of the neglected dwelling cast a shuddering chill over us all. It looked like a place of sorrows, of tragedies, of despairs. Instinctively I found myself peering up to one of its several gables for the attic window of Tom's ghost story and possible present prison.

A grinning idiot, with the hideous deformity of a dwarf, sat on an old ox-cart and saluted us with:

"Tom the Ready has gone to be an angel, he has."

"Poor fellow, come here. A man ought to treat such as you kindly, of all God's creatures. Where is Tom?" I asked.

The miserable face softened under strangely kind words, but the dull wits struggled in vain for any further reply than the one given. Tom had gone, gone up,

up ever so high, and in the probable standing joke of the house, "to be an angel." We interpreted it to mean imprisonment in the garret.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Greggs," I said pleasantly, as that individual came round the corner of the house with a hay-fork in hand.

As he made no reply, I continued:

"I've come for the boy, you see."

"Cuss it. So I see."

"Have the goodness to see that these papers are right."

"See here, stranger, that boy 'ud do you no sarvice. He told us last night that he'd never stay here, was goin' to be an engineer, said he'd be in the academy down to Buckston in two year in spite of me."

"Well, that's a laudable ambition."

"Cuss it agin. I say that's why I hate him. What right has he to be at books and gittin' up in life?"

"Is that a motive worthy to actuate a man like you?"

"Men have what motives they please. That's mine. I'll allus stand in the way of upstarts. He's brighter than my chil'en, he is? We'll see."

"Well, Mr. Keeper, have the kindness to produce the boy. Legally he's in my hands now."

"Find him, then," was the reply, as he turned to walk into the front door."

The idiot now darted past us, and with a dive disappeared in the kitchen door. Shortly he and the house-maid approached the carriage as we stood irresolute. The good-natured girl dared not approach till I invited her. She then barely whispered under her breath:

"You are to look behind the door in the main hall,"

and then whisked past us as if on the way to the well for water.

I immediately followed Greggs into the front hall and pushed back the door, which painfully rubbed the uneven floor, as if to speak in private with the man.

"Go out of the door, rather," cried Greggs.

But I had discovered a small piece of paper, apparently the fly-leaf of a book; placing my foot on it to hide it from Greggs' eye, I stooped, as if tying my shoe, secured the missive, and at once drove away from the house. The note read:

"He dared not whip me, but am in dark hole. Out doors dog barks. Come and hear him."

For a long time we studied Tom's ingenious last clause. One of the young ladies of our party guessed its meaning.

"The boy expected you to-day, but feared to tell any one save the cook; she must be his friend."

"Yes; but this out doors dog barks."

"Well, he is wishing he was out of doors."

"Quite true. Then what?"

"Can't you see? If a stranger like yourself approaches the house at night the barking of that dog I saw in the kennel will be sure to follow. At that signal Tom will try to escape from the attic. You are to come and he wants to meet you."

"Bravo! A girl for a puzzle any time. It is moonlight to-night. What say you to stopping at the hotel down in the village and driving home after midnight?"

"And you will prowl around this old fortress to meet your precious Tom?"

"Exactly."

In a word, it was so arranged. At eleven o'clock I

stood with my coachman under an apple tree at the north of the almshouse. My emergence into the moonlight for an instant was enough to provoke a tremendous "Bow wow!" with snapping and snarling and rattling of chain. In the whole range of vision no being appeared to stir as if roused. Then a piece of mortar fell at my feet. Looking up to the roof there Tom could be seen behind a chimney. Like a gray squirrel he was now at the eaves, then clinging to a window frame; then a woman's head darted out, an arm flung up a bed-cord; it was the good-natured cook. In a moment more Tom stood before me.

"Good-evening. You are kind to me, sir," he said. "but I can't go with you. I can't be dependent when I can help myself."

"But you shall work for me."

"No, I'm goin' to school this fall."

"I'll send you."

"No, sir. Thank you. I believe I can help myself. I shall never beg even a supper again."

"What are your plans then, Tom? I may advise you."

"Stay here and see."

In a twinkling he was off to the stables. I saw a horse turned loose into the pasture, evidently that he might not be followed, and Tom came up to us on Breeze, who picked her way as softly as a lady. The dog, too, was following as speechless as a dead one.

"Is this wrong? She's mine. I found her. She has paid for her keepin' by work. The dog was given to me. Greggs has tried to kill it, but I begged so hard that his wife put in her word to save it."

"Where are you going?"

"To my den in the hills."

"What then?"

"Then to school this fall. I am goin' to be an engineer. I shall support poor father. I shall find my sister."

"You are a hero. But Greggs will advertise you all over the country."

"Yes; but a thousand men couldn't find us, could they, Breeze?" and he patted the beast's neck softly, a caress which was answered by a right foot pawing the air, impatient to fly.

"Tom, I am going to give you this revolver. You will need it to shoot game. I make one condition. Never draw it on a human being. Boys should trust to their fists in an extremity, and to their legs to keep out of an extremity—their legs and right doings."

"I'll borrow it, for I shall pay you. I accept the conditions. Yet might I not use it to defend another fellow or a woman say, or my sister, if I couldn't help it?"

"I think so cool a boy as Tom the Ready, and with a heart that hates no one might. Yes."

"Now, Mr. Bolton—you see I found out your name—I'm going straight over to Mr. Kearsarg's place. He's her father, the beautiful little girl who taught me to read. She's my age, sir, but seems ever so much older, 'cause she knows so much, and dresses so splendid, and is so rich. Her father was a poor boy once. Now he owns a whole railroad. I've got a note for her to come over here and get a few books I've got. The cook will help her. I shall ride down in a night or two to get 'em."

"Well, now, it is midnight. You must go."

"One word more, sir. There's to be a bear hunt on

the mountains next week. Shall you go? 'Cause, if you do I'll see you somewhere, and you can spend the night at my house."

"How shall I find you? If I can, others can and will."

"Never mind. I hear the farmers hereabouts are out after a bear that's been killing some sheep lately. Next Saturday's the day, posted up on the town-hall in the village."

"I'll bring my friend to see the sport, and leave it to you to reveal yourself and hiding-place, Tom. Now, good-night. Give my love to—what's her name?"

"Sadie. Speak it soft like."

"Well, God bless you and Sadie. If you ever want a friend you know where I live, young self-reliance."

"One word more, Mr. Bolton. Will you kind o' look after my poor father for a day or two, or a week or so, when you go up to St. Albans, till I can turn myself and support him?"

"Heaven bless you, my boy! Yes. They who honor father and mother God has promised to honor."

And I wrung his little honest hand more proudly than if it had been a prince's palm.

Into the gloomy shade of the orchard, up the open pasture they went like the wind; clearing fences and ditches, on toward the solemn mountains towering in the moonlit night, went Breeze and her brave young rider, the dog flying like a shadow at their side.

As my servant and I turned away from the spectral old house all was still.



## CHAPTER IV.

### A BEAR HUNT.



T BEING so late we spent the night at Acton's little hotel. By the time we started for home this notice, printed in large type, was posted in a conspicuous place upon the sign-post on the village-green:

#### "STOLEN.

From the Town Poor-Farm, August 10th, a Black Mare, about fifteen hands high, white feet all around, full mane and tail, delicate limbs, weight about eleven hundred, answers to name Breeze with peculiar intelligence. Supposed to have been ridden away by a runaway pauper boy named Thomas Seacomb. For arrest of thief and restoration of property, twenty-five dollars reward.

"JEHIAL GREGGS, Almshouse Keeper.

"Prompt work," said one of the young ladies of our company. "The village editor must have composed it for him."

"It is just what I expected," he added. "Technically poor Tom is a thief; but morally I believe the boy has done no wrong. The world would acquit him, knowing all the facts."

"Still he is liable to arrest."

"Yes, if they can find him; and I'll defend him with the best lawyers of the State. But he'll take care of himself."

We saw the next day, in St. Albans, the same notice

posted, and read it at three or four cross-roads, as well as in the papers. I found the unfortunate elder Seacombe wandering about town, and sent him to a good man's home for safe keeping, at my charges.

Saturday seemed a long way off. It came at last, however; and my guest, a New York merchant, and I were twenty miles away from home at the foot-hills of the mountains, by seven o'clock in the morning. Farmers were gathering from every direction into the open pasture, each armed with a tin horn, or cow-bell, or some other implement of noise, though a few carried rifles.

The great mountains rose grandly above us in the cool of the morning. They stretched through several townships, all of whose people were interested in the hunt, for all had been more or less victimized by the bears that season among their flocks in upper pastures. Everybody was in jolly spirits, for a sort of holiday was before these hard-worked men and boys. Among the hundred men about us my friend and I were probably the only persons of leisure.

The plan of the hunt was this: Two lines were formed, stretching clear across the backbone of the mountain, and probably ten miles separating the two lines. One line was stationed, all armed and lying concealed at the end of the ten miles and just in the edge of a wood, a clearing of open pasture being in front of them. Into this open space, to be shot down, it was expected the other line, marching and shouting, tooting and bell-ringing, would drive the bears. This latter line was like a huge, living comb drawn through the hemlock-haired head of the mountain, to ensnare the huge vermin—brown bears.

My friend and I had unfortunately fallen in with the marching line. It was nearer to us. But we both loved the rifle, were armed, and hoped to have our chance at the big game.

Tom Seacomb was, however, uppermost in both our minds. Could the boy conceal himself from such a combing of the hills? Twenty-five dollars reward would be too much temptation for every one of these farmer boys, who hardly received that per month, should they stumble upon Tom's hermitage. But we were sure none of them ever suspected his hiding in the vicinity or had the lad in their thoughts.

The march began. And such a din!

"Right-hand man?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Right-hand man?"

"Here!"

So rung out the continuous shout. Each one was to keep within sight, if possible; surely within hearing of his right-hand man. It was constantly upon the lips of such as had no other means of adding to the uproar.

On we went into the beeches and maples at the foot of the mountain. Now climbing on among aged pines and hemlocks, scaring out rabbits, foxes and other small game, at which such rifles as were among us were constantly popping. I shot a gray hawk, and my friend an eagle, which measured five feet from tip to tip of its wings. Every living thing in the forest sprung up with wild alarm and scampered or soared on before us.

Could Tom escape? But happily there was no thought of him, and I trusted his retreat was secure from accidental discovery. Just as my thoughts were thus consoling me, this word came ringing down the line:

"Lookout for Tom the Ready! Thief from poor-farm, Greggs says, is hiding in hills. Twenty-five dollars reward!"

My heart gave a leap. Greggs was on hand. His wicked revenge and causeless malice still burned. The eagerness with which the rabble took up the cry pained and alarmed me. My friend drew near me and we were trying to devise plans as we stumbled along, when I observed:

"We are more than three thousand feet up. Here are dwarfed trees and rock. The boy cannot be up here. The line must have passed him and he is safe."

I had hardly finished speaking when the cry came up from a crowd who poured out into the clearing where a fire had burned off the timber:

"Thief! Stop thief! There he is!"

I looked above me, whither pointing arms indicated, and the great precipice rose fifty feet, with jagged boulders moss-grown.

Sure enough. There stood Breeze in relief against the sky, her mane and tail floating wildly in the mountain winds, her head erect and nostrils snuffing the scent of enemies.

Tom stood at her side, holding the bridle-rein. It was as grand an equestrian tableau as ever was seen, and deserved to be cut in bronze. I would put it in a school-house square and call it "Up from the lowest." The pauper boy, the victim of others' sins, the world against him, rising in life by sturdy industry, pluck and God's blessing.

But there was no time to waste in admiration. The crowd, overawed by the majestic scene for a moment, begun to climb toward the lad.

"Who dare follow me?" exclaimed one big fellow, as he begun to go up.

"Take him from behind," shouted another.

Ten or a dozen men took this hint and begun a circuit to the rear. In all probability thirty-five or forty men and boys were now springing to the pursuit. Tom was still calmly standing by his horse. He evidently knew what he was about. He shouted down the mossy ledge, where now several brawny fellows were come to a baffled pause:

"If I were to tell you the path, you have had too much hard cider to climb it. Breeze and I never drink."

A chorus of angry curses answered him, and I now saw Greggs himself among the pursuers.

"Good-morning, Mr. Greggs," said Tom. "I wish you no harm, and hence I warn you to go back. The path is not safe to cruel men."

"You young thief, you'll have time to read in jail to-morrow!" was the reply as the red-faced keeper begun scrambling up the crevice, held by the shoulders and hands of others.

"My friends, it is necessary for me to roll this rock down, as it is in my way," said Tom in a provokingly calm voice.

At the same time he bent over a large, delicately balanced boulder of about five hundred pounds weight. The effect would be terrible. The right of self-defense knows no limit but the law of mercy. I did not know Tom's great heart and sound head as well then as now."

"Tom!" I cried, "don't! It will kill a dozen men!"

"Ah, Mr. Bolton, a dozen men will get out of the way first. See?"

And the boy was right. The cowardly crew drew off,

hiding under the ledge. As his supporters dropped him, Greggs fell heels over head into the brambles. Recovering himself, blind with rage, he drew his rifle to his shoulder.

"If you fire, I fire!" exclaimed my friend, pale as death.

But there was to be no tragedy, for instantly a score of strong hands had grappled with the madman. The whole company abruptly changed its sympathies over this exhibition of murderous rage. Man after man cried out that they would not pursue the boy further, and begun tumbling down the rocks to go on with the hunt. Greggs struggled to rally them, but with half good-natured, half-serious purpose, they dragged him after them. Greggs broke from their hands, amid the curses and cries of "Shamo! shame!" which the farmers put up. I had not given them credit for so ready an appreciation of heroic boyhood.

Greggs had disappeared to join the party who, in ignorance of all these doings in front, were attempting the attack from the rear. What the nature of the ground was in that quarter I was ignorant; but Tom's coolness assured me that he felt secure. He had not turned his head once that way.

We were now alone. Tom called out to us:

"Now, gentlemen, be quick. Right up here."

We sprung up the rocks, were soon in the steep path, grasping Tom's hand, and shortly stood beside him, gazing upon one of the grandest landscapes I ever looked upon. It was a vista of more than sixty miles.

"This is not my front door, gentlemen," said Tom.

"You shall go out an easier way, and so I'll close this door."

He hurled the rock, like a huge wedge, into the crevice, closing it to all approach save by scaling-ladders.

"Will the attack from the rear succeed, Tom?"

"Look and see," said the boy, and we turned to look.

There was no rear, so to speak. For miles on miles the bare white skeletons of a "windfall"—a forest overthrown by a tornado years ago, and left to the dry decay which, in that upper air, made the fallen, tangled trees resemble a valley of dry bones glistening in the sun. No man could work his way through there. Besides, the precipice ran out on every side. Our level was inaccessible absolutely. The party from the rear would never appear.

"Now, then, good friends, come into my house. Come, Breeze, show us the way," said Tom.

I could but notice how manly Tom had become even in a few days of trouble, danger, self-reliance, and high resolve.

We passed down a gentle decline amid the rocks—a path not more than three feet wide for several rods. The wonderful horse came after us like a cosset lamb. Suddenly we were confronted by what appeared to be a bare face of moss-grown rock.

"I'll open the door," said Tom. "The dog, Cracker, is on the watch on the inside."

He pushed back a door of hemlock bark, on which mosses and small pieces of stone had been most deceptively fastened.

"Why, Tom, have you done all this in a week?"

"Why, no. God made the cave thousands of years ago, my Bible says. Then you know I've been here before, off and on, hundreds of times."

"When did you get that eagle spread over the further end of the room?"

"I killed it last fall. I found this sheepskin carpet more than a year ago. You see the bears had got into a flock, and there were three or four fresh carcasses up in the pasture one day, as I came up. I didn't see the bears, though."

"Where did you get all these books?" I asked, running my eye over a small school library of arithmetic, grammar, history, and a story-book or two for boys.

"You remember Sadie? Well, she gave me those. I have not had them long. I hain't got into the grammar at all. Arithmetic I'm at. The 'Child's History of England' and History of the United States I'm reading. The boy's story I have read all through. But it's mighty slow work for a fellow as hain't known his letters more than a year and a half, and no teacher now."

"Don't you meet your fair teacher once in a while, Tom? Now confess."

"I have been down twice. But what would her father say if he knew an advertised thief was a-coming to his house? For Sadie's sake I'll not go again until I can go a man. I'll be one yet."

"Tom if you were a thief I would have nothing to do with you, but to deliver you up. The law only seems to be against you. Return with me, and I'm sure I can defend you in open court. This property, Breeze, is yours by right of discovery—as much yours as any one's. You would surrender the horse to the rightful owner?"

"Yes, sir. Indeed I hear a voice Sadie calls conscience saying it's all right. I can read the Bible and pray God. I'm glad of your saying I'm not wrong. But I will work my own way. I'll buy that whole poor farm



yet and build my fine house on it, if there's anything in pluck and God's good-will helps me."

"Is that bed on the rocky shelf hard?"

"No; it's all moss and birds' feathers."

"Does the rain beat in on you?"

"Not much; perhaps a little with the wind strong. But you see this hemlock-bark roof sheds water pretty well. There is always a dry place in the rear of the cave."

"You cook outside?"

"Yes. The smoke of the fire is the thing I dread more than anything else. I always cook after night-fall."

"Your revolver has proved useful to you in shooting game, I take it. Here are three boxes of cartridges I have brought you. Remember your pledge."

"Yes, sir. I did not have it with me to-day when I knew the men were near, for fear of temptation. The revolver was in a shelf of the rock. I shot a rabbit yesterday; it was cooked last night. I have some brook trout; got a string of fifty yesterday. We will have rabbit, trout, blackberries and whortleberries for our dinner. I expected you. Can't give you any potatoes."

"Why, we saw acres of them and green corn growing down on the flats."

"Yes; but those are not mine. I'd not touch one of them, sir."

"Stick to that, Tom, and you'll prosper."

"Here's a fox-skin, sir. I shot the fox a week ago. Perhaps one of you gentlemen would be glad to buy it. In the course of the summer and early fall I shall have a good many. I have some mink-traps set for fall and winter. Every pelt will bring an honest penny. Then,

too, do you see that deer's head over the window? It's moist yet; I didn't know just how to stuff it; but I got salt and hay, with other stuff, down to the tanner's at Eatonville, where I sold the hide and venison. Wasn't he a beauty?"

"Tom," said my friend, "I'll give you ten dollars for that set of antlers. Deer are rather rare game in the Vermont mountains."

"And I'll give you five dollars for the fox-skin. It's a beautiful brush."

We passed him over the money. The boy then showed us his pocket-book, which had some fifty dollars, earned in so short a time. He had bought a poor rifle also with the earnings of his revolver. I did not think much of the piece, but concluded not to say so.

We now fell to the dinner. Tom played host with the ease of an old entertainer. Hunger was the best of sauce, and we quite cleared the board, which was a large slab of hemlock bark. From the dining-room window—a hole in the rocky sides of the cave—we could look out upon one of the rarest landscapes eye ever saw, miles below us and to the glorious west. A thunder-storm was raging down the mountain's side and in one part of the valley, while we were upon a sunlit pinnacle. We sat watching the play of lightning and admiring the scene for an hour. At length I said.

"Tom, we must go."

"But don't you want to shoot the bear they are after?"

"I'd forgotten all about the bears. The hunt is miles away from us by this time."

"Yes, but the bear is not. I saw her, with her cub, not an hour before you came up. They are off the scent by not climbing over this ledge back of my mansion."

"Are you sure of that?" eagerly exclaimed my companion, springing up, with his rifle in his grasp.

"Hold a minute, Mr. Tracy," I said. "This boy is of more account than the sport of shooting a bear. I want to mold his future. He has come to a crisis in his life very young. Every man meets this crisis sooner or later. Tom the Ready must make no mistakes."

"That's so, sir. A wise boy will take advice. I'm a boy with a stout heart, but I may be headstrong. Say to me just what an older man has a right to say."

"Tom, you have enemies—Greggs and that farm-hand of his."

"Yes, sir."

"If you take the right course you can foil them and live to—to do them the service of perhaps giving the beggar a supper out of your wealth. God's laws favor the true man."

"I believe that, sir; Miss Sadie says so. She pointed out the place in the Bible where it was written. A man, Job——"

"Yes, I see you know. Now I don't like your living in this mountain cave. It's too much like the boys of a sensational story-book. It will do for a time, because you are in a tight place; but successful men don't stay on a raft longer than is necessary to get ashore. You must go down among men and win your way by your two honest hands, a clear head with knowledge in it, and a true heart."

"Yes, sir; I have thought of all that. Do you suppose I ever meant to attempt a winter up here, freezing to death? There is no fun in this. It's awful here nights, with screech-owls, bears and lonesome thoughts—ugh!" and I could see that the boy's purpose was

higher, and his sensibilities too fine for a vulgar runaway among mountains, with rifle and adventure.

‘You’ll find adventures enough down among men, trying to be a true man.’

‘I know that, sir. May I tell you my plans? I am to find my little sister and get her away from my poor, drunken mother. God have mercy on her, for she is my mother! I have a father to provide for. I want to go to school at the academy this fall and for three or four years to come. I want to be an engineer or some railroad man. I want, by and by, to—to——’

‘Well, you are thinking about the fair-haired little girl who taught you to read and who has inspired you under God’s providence more than any earthly being with lofty purposes. But don’t be too sure of the girl, Tom. She’s rich and will be in the gay city this winter. There’s as good fish in the sea as ever were caught. Your manliness is the first thing. There’ll be Sadies enough when you become president of the railroad, and long before that, indeed, if you are on the way to such eminence.’

I saw the boy’s countenance fall, and knew that I had raised a mountain in his path which seemed harder to overcome than the Vermont hills swept with winter. However, he brightened at once and replied:

‘All that will take care of itself, sir, with Heaven’s blessing, she says.’

‘Oh, ho! you have got so far as to talk about it, have you?’

‘Why, you see I couldn’t help it. I was bound to go away from here. I knew it was no place for a boy who meant to be a man to be fooling around an old cave. I’m off next week, now that I’ve seen you again. And

so I went down on the Outlook Road where she drives." As he hesitated I filled up the picture.

"You met her dancing along in her village cart, with her pony, handsome as a picture, with glowing cheeks and flowing ribbons."

"That's it, sir."

"And her father came thundering after, with his turn-out, and a party of city friends to whom he was showing the country. And did the coachman pull up and the father sternly ask what all this meant?"

"Why, yes, were you there?"

"Never mind. And she answered the father that it was a poor, bright lad whom she had taught up to the school-house Sunday-school; and the father said Sadie had the tenderest heart of anybody in his family; was a dear girl, but she must not let her religion carry her too far with the poor."

"Well, sir," said Tom, "if you were not there some one told you just what happened. You see, sir, I'm to labor and she's to wait, I think. Within a week I'm off to school. I'll tell you where in my own time. Now shall we shoot the bear?"

I felt that the boy was headed right. But how would he escape his enemies? How earn his living? Would he ever get to be the man he dreamed of being? I resolved to keep within reach of any call for help he might make, and let him make the race of life for himself otherwise.

We stepped out onto the top of the rocks, my friend and I armed with our rifles; but Tom I noticed carried only his revolver. We could hear the din of the hunters, far away to the eastward, rising soft as music in the distance. There was the occasional crack of a rifle,

showing that only small game as yet engrossed their attention. We first struck out straight to the south, through underbrush and small growths which alone could grow at this altitude. We had been walking, guided by Tom, for perhaps half an hour, though moving round and round to that extent that we were not far away in a bee-line from Tom's hermitage.

All at once Tom's dog halted and bristled. Tom dropped upon his knee. There in the thick of the brush sat a female bear licking her cub at her side. We instantly agreed that my friend should have the gratification of the first shot. He fired. He had killed the cub.

"Quick, Mr. Bolton," said Tom.

I fired. I rarely ever missed my shot, but my foot slipped upon a moist stone and I only lamed her. We had now no dependence but Tom's revolver. The distance was fully fifty feet. Only a ball in the eye could do the business. The bear, enraged at my wounding and the death of her cub, rose up on her haunches with open jaws, throwing back her head, still further obscuring the eyes.

"Down her throat, Tom, for Heaven's sake!"

"No, the eye. I'll get it yet," answered he, and I noticed by his tone that he was as cool as an old backwoodsman. My impulse was to run, but the excitement kept me a spectator.

Tom fired. The shot had only cut the nose. He sprang upon a rock to fire again. But the beast, furiously angry because at bay, for otherwise she would have run herself according to the custom of this kind, advanced upon us. The lowered head was at least an advantage, though the rolling motion was not. Tom fired again. Nothing came of it. The bear was not thirty feet away.

"It is my last ball," said Tom.

As his arm was lifted I saw a moving shape just in the line of his intended shot. In a moment more I saw that it was the crouching form of a human being. I could only cry out:

"Don't risk the man!"

But it was too late. Tom's ball had gone upon its journey. Thank Heaven it was a true aim. The little missile went crashing straight through the eye without a doubt. The bear rolled over stone dead. But it was the last shot we had, and there stood Greggs, just within the bush with his rifle at his shoulder. From the crackle of underbrush it was evident that several of his friends were near at hand, emerging now from their ambush.

## CHAPTER V.

### A BUSINESS MAN.



GIVE you leave," calmly remarked Tom, "for that will hang you and rid the county of a pest."

"That speech was unworthy of you, Tom," I said, keeping up a conversation to gain time for my friend to reload his rifle in the concealment of my person, "for that means a foul thought in your heart. Self-defense is a right of every man. Vengeance belongs to God."

"I don't intend to noose my neck for the brat," put in Greggs, the rifle still covering us; "but I'm goin' to take yer hum this time, sartin sure, young 'un."

"You are an ignorant old scoundrel! I defy you! I'll die defending myself!" hotly exclaimed Tom, his two small hands, as I could see, doubled up like two bunches of twisted steel.

"Now, young 'un, I give you jist one minute to turn round and march to the den, where I'll take charge of the dog and horse. Come, I don't propose to walk hum," said Greggs.

"Not so fast, Mr. Greggs," I begun; "let us talk this thing over."

"Shut up, you city chap; you haven't got a shot among you."

His arms had grown weary and he dropped his piece to his foot, reassured by his own remark.

Like lightning Tom threw the fragment of a pine



knot. It had been lying at his own feet and the boy had been watching his chance. The flinty sliver flew true as a rifle-ball. It struck Greggs upon the right shoulder and his gun rattled from his paralyzed hands, sliding half-way to where I stood over the leaves and mosses.

“Good-by, gentlemen,” said Tom. “I’m off. See if the fellow’s hurt much. You are loaded now, Mr. Tracy, and can do as you please. Keep him till I get a fair start. I’ll write you how I get on at school.”

The boy was gone. Greggs was badly bruised, and, like all cowards—cruel men always being cowards—was only too glad to sue for help and mercy. It was more than an hour before we got his arm in a sling, the two bears’ pelts on a pole, and quitted the spot, helping the pain-racked man down the mountain as submissive as a lamb. We took care to descend by a different path from our hero’s; and in due time, as the sun was setting, left the miserable wretch at his own door. Our carriage was waiting at the school-house by the bridge, and by evening we were discussing the day’s adventures and wondering about Tom’s future plans in the dining-room of the village tavern.

“Where’s this academy Tom proposes to enter?” asked my friend.

“The State is full of these little schools. Some are very good. We might as well hunt for a needle in a haymow till the boy writes me.”

“The game is up then for the present. Well, next week I go back to New York.”

“And I go down to Montpelier on business the last of this month. There’s a school at the State capital and one at Barrie, a neighboring town. It is near the

time for the fall term to begin. I may yet see more of the little hero before I return to Boston in October."

How little we know of the future. It was more than two years later on that I sat one October day in a hotel at Montpelier, at the close of a day of business errands. I had often thought of Tom the Ready; had even made inquiries for him, but had not heard a word of his life since we parted on the mountain.

The incidents of Tom's escape were therefore rather out of mind, as a vacation episode I confess too lightly regarded. The boy seemed to have forgotten me, indeed. My eye rested upon this advertisement in the morning paper:

WANTED—Any information concerning a child, Bessie Seacomb, about thirteen years of age, formerly of St. Albans. News of great importance to her. Address office of ALANSON CLARKSON.

Alanson Clarkson was one of the leading lawyers in the State capital. In an hour I was at his office, where a clerk, reading by the hot gas-light, was ready to answer my questions.

"Who wants this information, if you will oblige me, sir?" I asked.

"I don't know," was the laconic reply.

"But I am a friend of the girl's brother."

"Yes," very cautiously, and not another word.

"Is her brother near here?"

"I don't know, sir. I can take any information about the child which you have to give, and pay you for it. That is all I know about it."

I wrote a note to Tom, explaining my presence and reminding him of his promise to communicate with me,

and addressing it to Mr. Thos. Seacomb, handed it back to the clerk.

It was a day or two later that, having received no reply, and being about to leave the capital for my home, I called once more at Esquire Clarkson's office

The clerk said:

"We know only the general manager of the Overland Express in the business, sir. The advertisements have all been withdrawn. It is presumed the little girl has been found. If you desire to see the principal in this business, you can apply in the office of the Overland Express Company, No. 320 Railroad Avenue."

I walked round to the above address. It was, I found, the office of a smart, new hotel, designed for farmers, drovers and transient guests of the respectable but not extravagantly disposed class.

"I want to find the office of the Overland Express. I was directed here, evidently by mistake," I said to the clerk.

"No mistake, sir. The new express is quite a curiosity in its way—not much known yet, but the world is going to hear from that Yankee lad yet," and he led the way to what was evidently designed as a coat-room.

"You said the lad. What lad?"

"Why, the fifteen-year-old boy who has organized the great Overland Express, sir. We are quite proud of him."

"What's his name?"

"We only know him as Tom the Ready. Good-day. That's his agent. Ask for yourself." And the good-natured clerk went back to his place.

Before me sat a boy, evidently about sixteen years old. A small table was covered with writing-paper and pen-

cels; the general litter of an express office was crowded into the little room, which was not much more than a closet, with one window, at best. I had never seen the lad before. He was bright, cheerful, busy as a bee, and turned to me with a pleasant, business-like air which was very gracious, despite his homespun dress and rural habit.

"Good-day, sir. Anything by the Overland?" he said.

"I don't know, my boy," I replied, hardly certain how to begin. "I want to inquire about the company of which you are agent."

"Well, sir, this is Tom's week in school, and he manages all the books of our concern. He will be here next week two days—Monday and Tuesday. But I don't think there is any of our stock to be located among grown men, sir. We have got all the money we want."

"My object was not to buy any of your stock, but to inquire about your friend, Tom," I replied.

"He has found the little child he was looking after, if that's your errand."

"Well, I'm glad of that. But to tell the truth I am a particular friend of Tom's. What does all this express business mean?"

"Well, again, it's a simple story. A fellow with an eye as bright as sunshine came to the seminary here in Montpelier this fall, and being poor like the rest of us for the most part, he has organized an express company."

"What's his name?"

"We only know him as Tom the Ready. If the teachers have found out any other name they are smarter than we are. He told the professor the first day that he

had his own reasons, but he would go away rather than tell any other name; he said they would find him studious and that he could pay all his bills. So that's the name he goes by. And he's so mighty smart, and such a capital fellow that we let it go so."

"Where does this express company run to?"

"Why, you see between the capital of the State and St. Johnsbury there are lots of towns as want a railroad. They can't get it yet. There's heaps of business in small parcels and such like. This boy Tom, he's getting up a company to do the business. We have not got to St. Johnsbury, but we shall, if Tom doesn't kill himself working day and night."

"How is this thing arranged so as not to interfere with your studies? You are all students, are you not?"

"Yes. Don't you know about it? All Montpelier is talking about it as a mighty bright thing for Yankee boys to do. You see, Tom looked all the fellows over for about two weeks after he came and school began. He was picking out his men. He had the idea in his head when he came. Then, one day—it was Saturday afternoon—he called twelve of us to his room. We supposed it was to be a ball club. But when we got there he had a map on the wall and lots of figures; he is a mighty nice talker, and by midnight we had formed the 'Overland Express,' sir. That's all. Tom the Ready is president and general manager. Excuse me, sir. It's time to fix up the bundles for to-night's departure."

"But I say, Mr. —, you didn't tell me your name?"

"Ketridge, if you please. Charley Ketridge."

"Mr. Ketridge, I *must* see Tom, your manager."

"All right. He'll be in here after study hours, at half-past nine, say, to-night."

"Can't I go to his room?"

"Not for love nor money. The boy's got to keep up work sometime, if he leads his class, hasn't he?"

Charley Ketridge now emerged from behind his table with a pair of old-fashioned saddle-bags, somewhat enlarged with sacking, on his arm. The bags were loaded to the neck. At the side door stood a horseman, splendidly mounted on as handsome a young, strong colt as I had ever seen. The rider was also a boy about, say eighteen years of age, evidently a farmer's son, and a student at the seminary. The bags were soon adjusted. A book of blank and filled-out forms in duplicate passed between him and Charley with all the formality of Adams' Express itself.

"All right. A good night's ride to you. You'll have a moon by nine o'clock, Bill. Haven't seen any more of those bad motions up by the pine forest?"

"No. I guess it was a false alarm. Good-evening," and off flew the splendid young animal, bearing its load as gayly as Mazeppa.

"You see, sir, we haven't got to wheels yet. But Tom says we shall. We now have four horsemen. Two start over the road each night, one each way, and the same for the day."

"I'm going to wait for Tom," I remarked, as we returned to the office, and Charley went at his clerical work with the pen, as he finished and folded up his last blank and asked:

"How do you get your lessons?"

"I am here except recitation hours, all this week. I study here this week. See my books? Next two weeks I have nothing to do. Then I go twice over the road. Some other fellow is at this desk. It's all arranged like

clock-work. Don't you know how men find lots of time for boating in colleges? The professors say this is better than boating; better than being out a term next winter to teach school. Besides, poor fellows have got to dig. Do you see? Tom's the fellow who arranged it all. He has the hardest of it. He scarcely sleeps or eats."

"What does he do?"

"Everything. He's everywhere. He's the general manager."

"And he is a remarkable young fellow."

"That he is. We all love him. He never swears, nor gets mad, scarcely, nor falls into the blues. He says we must struggle to rise in this world. There he is now."

Tom came briskly in. I had opportunity to mark his appearance as he edged his way through the throng in the outer hotel office, for as yet he had not caught sight of me. He was dressed in a new suit of stylish clothes of modest business pattern, a short boy's jacket of dark-blue, gray finely-fitting pantaloons, neatly polished boots; his neck was tastily arranged; his round, low hat sat well upon the shapely head of short-cropped raven hair. The noble brow was clean and white instead of the bronze of the poor-house days. The keen yet frank and sincere eyes seemed to see everything as he passed along. The handsome face of a pure-hearted boy with ruddy cheeks won everybody's favor.

"How are you, Tom, my boy?" rung out from a dozen drovers and produce buyers as he mingled with them. He had all the easy manners of an old business man.

"Mr. Bolton!" he exclaimed in joyous surprise as he espied me, and he came rushing toward me with both hands extended.

"Well, Tom, I'm glad to see you. But why have you not written as you promised?"

"A week ago I wrote you, sir. I waited till I could see my way clear to be a man. Then, too, I received your note yesterday telling of your presence in town, and embraced the earliest moment I could call my own to find you."

"Never mind. You are a man already. Why, my boy, you are a perfect wonder."

"Honest praise won't hurt me. I get hard knocks enough to prevent me spoiling by flattery."

"But how can you endure all this hard work and keep those red cheeks?"

"I never drink, never smoke, am careful what I eat, and take it regularly. Besides, hard study needs exercise as a balance. Then, too, I had a good constitution, please God, to begin with. I'm happy and getting on. That helps, you know."

"Yes. But you must dine with me, if it is late, and then tell me all about yourself. How's the little New York girl, Sadie?"

"I don't know, sir," and the first shadow I had seen crossed the splendid face. "It is not so very late. I cannot dine with you to-night. We have a meeting of our board of directors in the morning. I must get ready for it. By the way, will you come to my room and hear us talk? It will be Saturday, and after the meeting I'll dine with you and ask your advice about what you have seen and heard of our plans."

"Very well, if you say so. Give me your address," I answered.

"No, sir; I am but a boy. I will call at your hotel and walk with you to my room. Some time I may call



with my carriage; but it will take several years yet to make it," added Tom, with a musical laugh.

The boy turned promptly to his work with the agent, Charley Ketridge, at the desk. He had asked me to excuse him in a polite way. In a moment he was going through papers, counting cash, asking all sorts of questions. He ended by signing several checks for the next day.

"By the way, Charley, have you heard anything more about the suspicious movements up at the pine forest? I don't like that. I wish we could afford to hire a detective. But I shall have to go up myself. There are roughs in that country town who would as soon knock one of the boys over as not, I fear."

Charley assured him that nothing had been heard of late.

Tom turned to me with another cordial grasp of the hand and expressions of warmest gratitude; he then excused himself, and reminding me again of the appointed hour in the morning when I was to favor him with my company, stepped into the street. I walked briskly through the cool autumn air back to my hotel.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OVERLAND EXPRESS CO.



WITH the promptness which is one of the first marks of a true business man, Tom the Ready was at my hotel on Saturday morning. We walked joyously through the hazy air of an Indian summer, with scarlet shafts of sunrise and falling of brilliant leaves about us. Tom was chatty as a bird.

"Our school is just up that street, but ten fellows of us have hired an old dwelling-house down here in the village. We hired a man and his wife to keep it and we run the establishment. You see it's cheaper than to pay big profits to a boarding-house."

"You are a business man, every inch, Tom."

"Well, sir, it was not all business economy with me. I have my little sister Bessie with me now. The good woman of the house looks after her, and she goes to the public school. In my letter to you I sent you a check, and asked you to send my father down, unless you thought it best for him to stay where he is."

We had time to say no more, for Tom pulled a silver watch from his pocket and remarked that the board of directors was probably now assembled in his room.

Mounting the stairs of what had once been a fine old family mansion, now rather in decay, Tom ushered me into the large front chamber. Through the open windows the autumn sunshine fell among the branches of grand and aged trees yellow and red of foliage. Had

this mere boy so suddenly become master of such an establishment by honest industry and God's blessing on great abilities? Here was his study parlor, a library of books, and yonder his sleeping-room opening off from it. Carpet, easy-chairs, table, all comfortable, even though plain, and almost luxurious.

"Here comes the head of the house!" exclaimed a chorus of voices as we entered.

Young fellows, aged from fifteen to twenty, sat in various postures of boy-like ease around the room; some on window-sills, some on the table, some in chairs. Not one of them was as young as our hero, not one so fine-looking; yet all evidently above the average for intelligence and genuine qualities of heart.

Tom had shown another trait of a true man; he had picked out good associates. Another trait of a superior business genius, he had selected able and fit minds to work out his plans.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said Tom. "I have the honor of introducing my best earthly friend, Mr. Bolton. His extensive acquaintance with business has also led me to invite him to be present at our meeting."

One after another was presented to me in person. Tom rang a little bell, when an elderly man presented himself at the door.

"We will have a few more chairs from some of the other boys' rooms, if you please, Mr. Cranker."

I was glad to see that our hero had the air of a kind and polished gentleman in his address to a servant.

When all were seated, Tom called for the report of the last meeting. He then arose himself and read from slips of paper.

GENTLEMEN.—It gives me great pleasure to present you the report of the treasurer, placed in my hands:

## EXPENSES FOR ONE MONTH.

Five horses purchased.....	\$600.00
Additional saddles, pouches, etc.....	100.00
Additional desks, tables, stationery, printing.....	150.40
Horse-keeping, board of men on route, etc.....	100.60
Repairs .....	10.00
Rent at various country stores on route and in town.....	50.00
Renumeration for losses on parcels.....	2.00
Government license, paid monthly.....	20.00

Total.....\$1,033.00

Total capital now invested.....\$1,200.00

## INCOME FOR ONE MONTH.

September 15th.....	\$3.00
September 16th.....	5.00
September 17th.....	6.30
September 18th.....	6.66

“But I need not read you in full, gentlemen,” said Tom, “for the books are open to your inspection. The total for express matter for the month, increasing every day in volume, is nine hundred dollars. I predict that in another month, during which the farmers will have finished their harvesting, and wives and daughters will begin to order goods in the village here, when also we shall become better known, we shall treble the amount.”

“How about getting the contract for carrying the mails?” asked a young fellow from the corner of the room.

“I fear we shall have to prove that we are more than school-boys at play first,” answered Tom. “By next spring-term I believe the Overland Express Company will be running several wagons and be serving Uncle Sam as mail-carrier. However, the pay is not much

any way. It's the name of the thing mostly that I care for.

"Now the present showing is this," continued Tom. "We are twelve young fellows, all told. We have put into this business one hundred dollars each. Hard-earned money with some of us. With some of us that's more than half of what we expect to expend for the fall term. We've got to live. I promised to see you all out and better. My money is with the rest. We have invested every dollar subscribed in the business. Our running expenses amount this month you see to one hundred and eighty-two dollars. Each man counts his time, when he has been over the road as messenger, or in the office as agent, as an equal contribution, not naming the sum. We have to-day seven hundred and eighteen dollars to divide among twelve men. That makes fifty-nine dollars and eighty-three cents for a share. Are you satisfied?"

"Splendid! Can I take my share now?" exclaimed one young fellow, springing up with pocket-book in hand.

"Hold on!" said another. "Mr. President, do you think it wise for us to draw out all our dividends?"

"No, sir, I do not," answered Tom. "I fully believe that every man of you will have two hundred dollars as dividend by the fifteenth of November, our next meeting. But we may have accidents and losses. We should put by a surplus to provide against such. We ought to be honest with the world. We are men and not children."

"That's so," said Charley Kettridge. "All I want is a new overcoat, which I can buy for twenty dollars."

"Once more," Tom continued, "we ought to extend

the business. I believe we can run a wagon over the road twice a week."

"That's what you call increasing the capital stock, is it not?" inquired a big fellow from the window ledge.

"Exactly," answered Tom, "only that we don't propose to increase the number of shares to ourselves. That would be watering our stock. Nor do we propose to let any new fellows in, so long as we can carry it ourselves."

"Well, you can do as you please," put in the same young man by the window. "But when I see nearly sixty dollars lying around that belongs to me to-day, I'm going to have it. I'm just going to come out in a Boston suit of clothes, boys."

"Very well, Mr. Crompton," answered the ready Tom. "The treasurer will pay you, so far as that is concerned. I guess the boys will not demand a vote. Indeed, that was so understood to begin with. But if we get into debt, you are liable to be assessed one-twelfth, owning one share."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes. Suppose you sell out to me. I'll give you one hundred and five dollars for your share—that's five per cent. premium."

"Done!" exclaimed the fellow, and the transfer was made on the books.

Mr. Crompton left the room with the treasurer's check for fifty-seven dollars and eighty-three cents, and Tom's for one hundred and five dollars.

"But, Tom," I whispered, "have you got the money? I'll loan it to you, if you want."

It was the first word I had put in. Tom leaned over to say to me:

"It cleans me out save twelve dollars, sir, of all I've laid aside. But I'd rather not borrow."

"Gentlemen," said Tom aloud, "we now stand eleven men. I own two shares. If we make what I expect, four hundred dollars will come to me from my two shares next month. Does any other fellow want to sell out?"

"No! no!" shouted the crowd.

"I move," said Charley Ketridge, "that we place two hundred dollars as surplus against accident and losses. I move that we expend five hundred dollars in buying an express-wagon and otherwise increasing the facilities of the business, as the general manager shall deem best."

Like a flash of lightning it was seconded and carried, so great was the confidence in Tom.

"No one of the absent can now draw out his dividend, according to the understanding we begun with. A vote is a vote."

"Not one of them will wish to, Tom. We all believe in you. Go ahead!" exclaimed several voices.

"Then each man is privileged to draw twenty-four dollars and thirty-four cents now and here. That will more than pay for board, and will buy a good coat, if it is not silk-lined," said Tom. "I predict, gentlemen, that every one of you will see this term closed with at least five hundred dollars in his pocket and a share in the Overland Express besides. I'm glad I've got two shares. It will make me double. Mr. Crompton has blundered."

Charley Ketridge here arose and said:

"Gentlemen will please come forward and take these slips, which are the allotment of each one as to the days

he's to ride over the road, act as agent at each town, etc."

The checks were also made out, Tom signing with the treasurer. Each boy folded them away in his wallet.

"This pays better than base-ball, eh?" chuckled one fellow as he thrust his pocket-book back into its place. "Tom, you are a wonderful fellow; you could build a railroad."

"I may do it one of these days, across this very route that we are working," answered Tom.

"And now," continued Tom, rising to his feet, "I have an affair of very serious moment to present."

The room grew hushed, as if every one knew of the grave affair in hand.

"You all know that there is a bad place in the woods just this side of the village of Marshfield. Our Mr. Tollard was threatened with attack there one night last week. The nights are growing longer. We may have trouble there. It is known that we carry valuable parcels. But, Mr. Tollard, tell us the case."

A young fellow about sixteen years old, brown and hearty, now arose.

"Mr. President: I was proceeding toward Montpelier. I had taken a gold watch belonging to the postmaster at Marshfield, to be repaired in the village here. I saw two or three rough-looking fellows in the country store which the postmaster keeps, as I took the package; but I was mounted on your Breeze that day, Mr. President, and I didn't anyhow dream of being molested. Well, sir, it was an hour later and getting quite dark when I came to the woods in question. It is a lonely spot. The Onion River runs along by the road here, and there's a bridge, and forks of a road leading off to Peacham



Pond. The woods are pretty thick after you pass the guide-post, and one can hardly tell when he's near the bridge but for the dashing of the waters. A fellow spoke to me right on the bridge. As he only said 'Good-evening,' I answered him civilly. But just then I saw, I am sure, another fellow's head pop up from below the bridge. I could barely distinguish his dark shape against the foam of the stream. The first scamp put up his hand toward my horse's bridle. But you may be sure I didn't wait to hear or see anything further, for that little mare cleared the road like the flash of a pistol, and we got safely into town."

"You omitted to relate what you thought you overheard as you went on," prompted Charley Kettridge.

"Oh, yes! I thought I heard one fellow say, 'Greggs,' or 'Gibbs,' or some such name, 'that's not the boy you want.'"

I looked at Tom. His fine face turned pale as ashes, and his lips tightened as if he feared to trust himself to speak. His eyes met mine with a look which spoke volumes, however. I had had no opportunity to inquire as to whether his old enemy was still pursuing him or not. All the boys sat in speechless silence. They had not calculated upon the grave dangers of robbery which an express company has to guard against, even in civilized New England. The general opinion, of course, was that plunder was the object of these men. Poor Tom and I now knew better than that.

"Gentlemen," Tom begun, "will you allow me to retire and advise with my friend, Mr. Bolton, a few moments?"

We stepped at once into the next room, Tom turning the key in the door after us.

"Is it not too bad, Mr. Bolton? I am just beginning to do well. By next spring I ought to be worth a couple of thousand dollars, and now that old wretch Greggs is following me up!"

"But, Tom, I supposed I had convinced the selectmen of Acton Township, the men who hire Greggs to keep the almshouse, that the mare was yours. They certainly told my lawyer that they were satisfied," I replied.

"I know you did. I wrote offering to pay whatever the horse was worth, if I was liable by man's laws. They answered that it was all right. Here's the letter."

"That old scoundrel means to ruin you on his own private account."

"Yes, he's hired these fellows to waylay me. They could easily have captured poor Dick Tolland, but he was not the boy they were after; so he escaped. I'm the victim. Then, too, probably that bad man would have hurried me out of this region. It would then go forth that I had turned swindler and run away with the funds of the Overland Express. Don't you see? These poor boys robbed of their money by being too confiding in a wild, crazy-headed little fellow whose name was only known to be Tom the Ready."

"Tom, what makes you think so? Your eyes are sharp."

"Why, it would be the easiest thing in the world for two or three strong men to kidnap a little chap like me. I am not a man grown, if I am doing a grown man's part in life."

"They wouldn't dare to murder you," I said to draw him out.

"No, but they would do worse—blacken my good name for years and years to come. What's a boy good

for with a blot on his good name? I purposely stayed right here in Vermont that I might live down the lie they set afloat about me at the poor-farm; that I might redeem my father's good name; that I might overcome the stigma of my mother's bad actions; that—that—well, that Miss Sadie, who comes up here every summer among the Green Mountains, might see the poor-house lad a conqueror on the spot."

Tom spoke with great warmth; but I could see that a terrible struggle was going on in his mind. I broke the silence at length by asking:

"What do you want me to do? Why have you asked to see me alone?"

"To get time to collect my thoughts. No man shall risk anything for me. This thing has got to be met," he went on, pacing the floor with his hands at his forehead. I preserved silence, anxious as I was willing to suggest my own plan, but yet resolved to see first what this remarkable boy would devise for himself.

"I have knowingly wronged no living man. I ask God daily to help me. It cannot be that He will desert me. She is worth dying for. I may as well die in the path of duty; better die there than anywhere else. Is it not a good place to die, at the post of duty? I'll meet these men."

"How so, my boy? Not to attack them?"

"No, no. But I must meet Greggs and settle this by convincing him that he had best forever let me go my way. To have him arrested by appealing to the law will force me to reveal who I am; and the publicity of the whole affair in the papers by the police-court account would do me great injury. For men would not, if they could, understand. There are scores of men who would

be glad to believe bad of the too-smart boy, as they call me. They would like to see me humbled."

Before I could say anything in reply Tom had opened the door.

"Come. I see my way. We must go back, or the fellows will not know what to make of our absence."

Tom arose and said to the room-full:

"Gentlemen, it is evident that there is mischief in some man's mind toward me personally. I cannot tell you more than that. I shall not allow any of you to be put in danger for my sake. It is Mr. Conklin's turn to go over the road this afternoon. I shall insist on taking his place."

A dozen throats cried "No!" mine among the number. The generous boys flocked around little Tom, as the Old Guard used to do about the little Napoleon, and for a moment the room broke into the intensest excitement and confusion.

Tom stood the only calm one in the crowd. At length he made himself heard:

"You know, boys, I'm neither a fool nor a coward. Hear my plan. I shall take my own Breeze. To-day I shall pass that spot before dark. To-morrow is Sunday and we rest. Monday I shall return and pass the dangerous place after dark. It must be only some rough farm laborers, hired by some scamp to attack me. I shall not be alone. If six or seven of you care to ride out there to meet me, you'll be welcome; but the fun will be over before you get there. Now trust me. I know what I am about."

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWO TRAPS ARE SET.



HERE was always something in Tom's presence to command obedience when he made a request. After Tom's last remark not a fellow in the room ventured to interpose an objection. The board meeting broke up at once into little eager knots of noisy disputants, each voice having its own theory to offer and plan to urge; but none risked a word of advice or opposition to Tom. The boys gathered about him with a hushed respect and dependence upon his clear head and self-mastery which was a study to look upon.

Tom rang a bell, when the old porter appeared.

"Please to order my horse to the door, Mike. You see," continued the boy addressing me, "I love that mare so much that I have her in the old stable of this establishment. "It's a rickety old place, but under my eye, and not extravagant either."

We were all soon in the yard, where, under the dilapidated carriage porch, Tom stepped into the stirrups and drew up the lines, the beautiful animal prancing with echoing hoofs upon the pavement.

"You look like a general surrounded by your staff, Tom," I said.

"I say, old fellow," exclaimed one, "it is a shame that you will not let your soldiers follow you."

"That's so!" chimed in the chorus.

"It's all right, boys. I know your hearts. But my

way is best. I shall carve out work enough for you, maybe, before I get back. If you come out Monday afternoon on the road don't expect to meet me about the bridge. I shall be nearer town than that, and the victory won. You'll find all the business, money, papers, etc., in Charley Kettridge's hands, if anything should happen to me."

"We'll wake up this whole State in vengeance if any injury is the result to you!" shouted a voice.

"Boys, don't despair of me, if I am not able to put in an appearance for a week, say. I add this by way of caution. Believe in me; a fellow can dare anything for those who trust in him. Nothing weakens a man's arm like suspicion—unless it is guilt. Good-by."

"Three cheers. Hip, hip, hurra!" rang out upon the air, and Tom scurried away down to the office in the hotel to get the day's load of express and be gone.

I felt disappointed that Tom Seacomb had not given me an opportunity of parting confidences. Turning through the hall I met his sister Bessie. I had never seen the child before. Rarely have I ever seen so fair a human face. Blue eyes, deep and tender, now filled with tears, her bright hair falling in sunny abandonment about a pure and shapely forehead, graceful and small like her brother, dressed in exquisite taste of simplicity and refinement. Her lips were trembling with emotion as she held the door of her room and accosted me.

"Oh, sir, what is this that my Tom is doing? He just kissed me good-by, and he seemed so troubled! He said I was to ask you, if anything went wrong."

"My poor child! Then this is the other fairy the boy is working for. Well, I don't blame him for being a giant for the sake of two such little women. But I see

you do not understand. Bessie, your brother is a brave, true boy. He has gone upon a troublesome errand—to extricate himself and his family from a bad man's toils. He will come back all right. I am going right after him to help him. You are to stay here. Attend to your school as usual. All will be well."

I kissed the troubled, upturned face of the little beauty. She, too, had learned to trust Tom in that life of changeful fortunes she had led; and without a further word the child went back to her chamber.

It was five o'clock of the afternoon before I had sent a telegram and received a reply that gave me a few days' more leisure to follow the fortunes of Tom the Ready. A good driver and a stout pair of horses drew me swiftly over the road after Tom, but too far behind to overtake him. I put up considerably after dark at a miserable apology for an inn, at a little village, or rather cross-roads chalet, a number of miles out from Montpelier. Here I was to pass Sunday and await Tom's adventure on his return. Strolling into the village post-office, I asked:

"Has the Overland Express passed east to-night?"

"You mean that boys' express. I should think so. Here it is after eleven o'clock. The messenger's half-way to West Danville by this time," replied a gruff voice.

I didn't like the voice, the manner of the reply, nor the man. But, thank Heaven! Tom was all right for his outward trip. He was correct in his reasoning. The trouble was plotted for his return, without doubt, if at all.

A quiet Sunday followed. It was dusk of nightfall again when, as I sat by the gloomy window of the great

public-room in the village tavern, I saw two rough-looking fellows emerge from the stable, whither they had just driven a mud-splashed team. An exceptionally early snow lay on the ground, but the earth was not frozen.

Pausing just at the corner of the veranda, one of the men pointed to the post-office. I saw a light now flash out from the country store where the post-office was located. This was unusual in a village where Sunday was so rigorously regarded.

The two strangers now entered the tavern and pushed up to the bar for drinks. I had expected this. Desperate errands demand the desperate fire of rum. I shrunk into the corner by the great, open fire-place and pretended to be asleep.

"It is a whole day we have to wait yet before the job," said one of the two, as he dropped with a sullen reel into a chair, stretching out his feet.

"Confound it! that's so. Landlord, more drink this way," replied the other.

"But we have got to keep our heads enough to get the points from this feller over at the post-office. Be careful, Pete; you've got 'bout 'nough already."

"Josh, you are a coward about the whole affair!" replied the man called Pete.

Josh? I had heard that name before. But where? Ah, the red-head at the poor-farm in Acton. His name was Josh—the tool of Jehial Greggs' cruelty toward Tom. But yet this was not the same face. I stirred and peered forward to penetrate the disguise. It was the same fellow, most skillfully disguised; indeed, Greggs' man. But the old fox himself was not here.

Alarmed at my motions, the two brutes got up and



went silently out, leaving their grog unfinished on the table. They went straight across to the store. Within ten minutes I had communicated my suspicions to the honest, kind-hearted landlord that his guests were scoundrels bent on kidnaping the boy-agent of the Overland Express.

Quick as thought he suggested my entry into the cellar of the post-office store by a rear door which he knew of, and in less time than I can take to tell it, seems to me, I was there, with my ear to the cellar-door, not two feet from the plotting miscreants.

The crazy door let streams of lamp-light through its cracks. I was afraid to breathe lest I should be heard by the men, whose ugly faces I could have smitten without advancing beyond an arm's length.

"Why, yes; we have just to pounce on him; he's nothing but a boy. Then we put him into this sack," holding up a long meal-sack, "and away to Montreal with him," said the miserable villain, Josh.

"But why go away off out to those woods? Do it here," interposed the wretch, Pete.

"No, never!" hissed out the store-keeper, for it was he who made the third of the triumvirate of crime. "He gets here at half-past four o'clock, and that is broad daylight yet. This means State's prison if we are found out, my fine fellows. Everybody here knows me. I've got to be careful."

"Anyhow, my friend, they'll find you out, you old dog," answered Pete, who, to tell the truth, seemed to have little heart to go on with the bad business, anyway.

"I swear they never will. I put five hundred dollars into the express-bag that night. The boy disappears,

as you whisk him off to Canada. I am robbed. I join in the cry with this man Greggs. It is given out that this boy has bagged the treasury of the express company which he pretends to have established. Everybody will believe it. Who ever knew a boy of his years to be as smart as he pretends to be? Who ever knew a boy to resist the temptation to take all the money that evidently is within his reach?"

"Yes," put in Josh, "and then if they get too hot on our scent, why, we can surrender the rabbit and claim the reward—a hundred dollars reward for his arrest! See?"

"Why, you fool," said Pete, "that's the game anyway."

"No; my boss wants to get him out of the country onto a ship; drugged, you know, unless they git after us too hard."

"Curse your boss! What's he got agin the boy?"

"Never mind that, now," put in the postmaster. "You two chaps go to bed, and be called early. It's been too dark to see your faces. Hang round those haystacks just above the road by the bridge, down here seven miles away. The black woods begin right at the end of that farm. Take him just by the woods. That's all. The farmer's name is Gus Berry. He don't know of this. But inquire for Gus Berry's place. Don't inquire if you can detect the spot by them hay-stacks on the left."

The Gus Berry place. I waited to hear no more; I had the whole plan. Oh, that I had Tom's plan, too! In a few moments I was back to my own apartment in the tavern, and the landlord and I were planning together. We soon heard the two roughs come in, the

hostler guiding them up to bed, and their order to be called at four o'clock. What should we do?

"Do?" exclaimed mine host, out of his honest heart.

"Why, I'll have a posse of men there to snap up the precious rascals in a trice!"

"Not so fast. These two are only tools. If we could only get that fellow Greggs," and then I ventured to relate Tom's story.

"Well, he's somewhere about."

"Maybe, quite likely; but if you pounce upon the others, he takes alarm and is off to Canada himself."

In those days we had no extradition treaty, practically, with the Dominion.

"Now, this little friend of mine has some plan in his active brain. I'd give a good deal to know what it is. But you may be sure he means to meet Greggs once for all and settle this business at the root. We will have no posse, if you please. You are a brave man, I take it. You and I must go together; we will seek that fa m."

"Yes; I know the Berry place."

"Very well, we will be armed. But of all things I dread to draw weapon upon a brother man. A terrible memory that would be as long as one lived. Yet we are armed. We are three against two—or three, if Greggs is about. You, Tom the Ready, and I. You and I will lie in ambush for Tom's approach at the hay-stacks. Eh?"

"Exactly. I am with you."

By daylight of the next morning I was awake, and I confess, after all these years, that that slowly dragging forenoon was about as intensely miserable with anxiety as I have ever passed. The landlord and I sat chatting

in a dull sort of way after dinner. The leaden skies of early winter hung like a black serge over the earth, and scarce a human being came or went across the village-green.

Every one seemed to anticipate a cold November rain or snow. It promised to be a night of darkness.

Judge of our surprise when, about two o'clock, Tom's horse splashed up to the tavern door, and the cheery voice of the boy rung out:

"Hostler, give her good care. I'm early enough for a long wait this time."

"Here are your pouches, sir. I'll take them to the office as usual," answered the attendant.

"No; I will have a room to-day. Bring the saddle-bags direct to my room at once," answered Tom, as he sprung lightly up the steps.

"How are you, my lad?" warmly shouted the landlord. "Never was gladder to see you. Here's a friend of yours."

"Why, Mr. Bolton!" shouted Tom, as he grasped my hand.

Instantly a shadow overspread his face, however. I interpreted it promptly, saying:

"Yes, I've come out to help you, and I have thought it best to let our honest friend, the tavern-keeper, into our secret to an extent. Sit down and eat while I tell you all that we have discovered, and our plans, too, since you so break in upon us."

The hungry lad fell to with a relish. Who ever knew an innocent boy, high-minded and healthy, to be too much worried to eat? As he plied his knife and fork I plied my tongue. When we each had finished, Tom turned back his chair and said:

"Gentlemen, I always thank a friend for a kind intent. But I have a plan. I suppose I had best tell you. Will you help me lift those saddle-bags to the table? Now lock the door, please."

Mine host rose to obey his instructions, saying:

"You have a big package to-day, Tom. It's heavy as lead," placing the pouches upon the table.

"It is not all the rush of business, Mr. Nicholas. That's the armament for to-night's adventure. That jar is full of phosphorus. Don't break it," answered Tom, as he took out a small glass jar and placed it at his side.

"Phosphorus! What under heaven do you mean to do with that?"

"You see, sir, these blockheads who are hired to attack me are ignorant farm laborers, or low scoundrels, who are capable of being frightened out of their wits. What a revolver would not do in that line a little chemical experiment may do. We are just going through chemistry at the academy this term. I propose to utilize my small stock of knowledge. I can see them run now," added Tom with a merry laugh.

"And what on earth is this?" asked the astonished landlord as he grasped two polished metal handles, drawing them out of the saddle-bags, with long, green silk cords attached.

"Let me help you, sir," promptly responded Tom, starting to his feet.

The young fellow then carefully lifted out an electromagnetic apparatus, placing it on the table.

"You are familiar with the use of this, Mr. Bolton," said Tom. "We will show our friend, the landlord, just how we use it, however."

Tom here thrust the two handles into the unsuspecting Nicholas' hands. The plates were dropped into the acid-jars, which were portable and otherwise arranged with unusual convenience.

"Now, sir," said Tom, "as I thrust this small bar into this coil of wire you will feel the electric shock. If I should plunge the bar in suddenly, and very far, the effect would be tremendous. See?"

"Oh! oh! Great Cæsar! Oh!" cried out the poor man.

"Well, let go the handles if you have had enough," answered Tom, laughing, but still holding the iron bar within the coil.

"Let go? I can't. Oh, by gosh, stop!" groaned the man, doubling up his arms with spasmodic twitches, still grasping the two handles with convulsive clutch.

"No, you cannot let go till I allow you. I will now. See? I withdraw the iron bar, so"—suited the action to the word—"and you are at liberty."

"Yes, thank Heaven!" moaned out poor Nicholas as he rubbed his benumbed arms with his trembling hands.

"Now, my friends, of course I could nearly, if not quite, destroy life with the electro-magnetic shock. I have only played with our friend here. I shall be very careful with those other chaps; but if I can manage to get their thieving hands onto those two handles—if I can tempt one of them, I mean, to grasp these shining bars, which, hid away in these pouches, look like something precious enough to make a thief's eyes water, I'll set him to dancing in a way that will be fun, eh?"

"Capital, Tom," I shouted; "you are a bright boy! But what if you do not get their greedy grasp on the

handles? They may drag you off your horse a prisoner and lead you across fields in no time."

"Then I must manage to cajole them into the snare in some place where they halt with me in flight. I shall get them. Be sure of that. Did you ever see a fox who could keep away from the trap? My phosphorus will then come into play."

"All right. Manage it yourself. Mr. Nicholas and I must be off. Here are our horses. We'll watch the fun, and be ready to help you, too, if need be."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ONE TRAP SPRUNG.



IT IS very dark, Mr. Nicholas," I said, as we lay down by the fence in concealment an hour and a half later.

"Yes, but keep your eye on those haystacks. There comes Tom's mare splashing through the mud. The boy is whistling."

"Halt!" cried out a rough voice.

At the same time a dark-lantern flashed its light full in Tom's face. The gleam of a revolver in a red-shirted clutch also appeared, the weapon bearing full on the young rider.

"All right, my fine fellow. You are rather abrupt. But what do you want?" replied Tom, cool and cheery as you please.

"Git off that, quicker'n lightnin'!"

Tom got down. The other fellow pulled off the pouches. All three moved straight across the road, without a further word, toward an old barn that stood in the open field. The dim outline of the shanty could just be distinguished against the gray snow.

Tom's stratagem had failed. He was being dragged away. We instantly sprung forward, and in less time than the telling takes we stood peeping through the cracks of the barn, revolvers in hand.

"Now, open up here, young 'un," said Josh, beginning to tug away at the straps of the express pouches.



"We have quite a journey before us. Guess a little money can be carried better in our own pockets."

Tom obediently laid open the two leathern flaps.

"I swear, Pete, them's handsome! What's them shinin' things, my lad?"

"I'll show you, gentlemen. That machine is worth millions to mankind."

Tom arranged the battery, the wondering fools looking curiously on by the dim light of the lantern.

"Now, if you will let me off free, I'll show you how to use this, and leave it with you. Perhaps you can make your fortune. Just take hold of those handles, one in your left hand; now join your other two hands, and this second man will grasp the other handle with his right. Ready?"

"Gosh! Zounds! Blazes! Oh!" shouted the two scoundrels in chorus as Tom pressed the bar into its place.

"Don't speak so loud, gentlemen," soothingly whispered Tom. "You would never do for counterfeiterers if you holler like that."

"I swow! Oh! Let up on us!"

"Drop the handles if you can't endure the working of the machine. But I'd really like to show you how the silver dollars begin to roll out," answered Tom as he plunged the rod deeper and deeper into its place.

The two scamps now fairly writhed and shook. Their arms twitched, their elbows twisted, their knees doubled, their parted lips could scarcely whisper. Tom drew back his bar of torture, and Pete and Josh sunk back speechless on a pile of straw, unharmed, but looking upon Tom as if he were a wizard and his machine a sorcery.

"Well, Josh, I know you. Take off that wig. Tell me where Greggs is. He must be somewhere about here. If you refuse to answer me I vow to you I'll call down fire to write your doom forever. Do you know that I can write your fate in flame?"

The miserable wretch answered not a word, but cowered in terror or unyielding hate—I could not tell which—upon his couch of corn-stalks and straw.

"Let that other fellow speak, then. Where is the man who hired you to put me into a meal-bag and ship me to sea?"

They both started to their feet, and were about to make for the door. They were thoroughly convinced now that Tom was a worker in the Black Art. How should he have read their secret?

"Stop!" shouted Tom, trying almost in vain to keep up the frown of spectral awfulness upon a face ready to burst forth into laughter. "Stop! or I'll call up infernal spirits to confront you! Look!" and Tom had somehow managed to spatter the great barn-door over with a handful of phosphorous. It sparkled, palpitated, and glowed with ten thousand living, blinking eyes.

"Tom Seacomb! For the Lord's sake let up on us fellers. It was old Greggs who hired us. Come out, Greggs. Come out! The boy's got power to damn us forever!" whined forth the abject voice of poor Josh.

Tom waited. He slid back the fender of the dark-lantern and cast its rays all around the dim old barn, up among its rafters, into the haymow, stalls, everywhere.

"Greggs, come forth! You are here I now know. Come forth, or I'll send the whole crowd of you to prison! How do you know but I could smite you dead?"

The echoes of the boy's voice had hardly ceased when, from behind an old threshing machine, Greggs unlimbered himself and crawled forth. He was thoroughly frightened, being as much of an ignoramus as his miserable tools before him.

"I knew I should encounter you. Now, old man, why cannot you and I be quits forever? Swear to me that you will never cross my path with evil intent again. Get down on your knees, all three of you, and swear!"

"I vow, boys," stammered out Greggs, "ketch holt of the little devil, can't yer? Kneel to him!" and the brute grasped a sled-stake from the floor, half-advancing on Tom. I remember that I drew my revolver, sighting the poor-house tyrant through the crevices.

Quick as an acrobat Tom sprung to the door, and with his crayon of phosphorus wrote across its surface in a bold, running hand:

**"PREPARE TO MEET THY DOOM!**

**"Signed,**

**BELZEBUB!"**

The fiery letters seemed to be alive. Whoever has seen the peculiar crawling, serpentine movement, left behind the scratching of a match upon a wall, can easily picture to himself the "characters of living light" which, like burning snakes, appeared to writhe and twist in the blackness from that door. The pencilings were as thick as one's finger. They paled and glowed. One moment the handwriting seemed utterly gone; then it would burn into visibility again; perhaps beginning at one end and slowly running on to the last word. It was a weird, infernal effect. It made me shudder in the darkness.

The three guilty, superstitious wretches were all on their knees in the straw. Tom, choking with the inward contentions of fun and anger, stood over them, the vivid fragment of the phosphorus in his hand.

"I swear, Tommy, dear Tommy. I swear anything. I allus said yer was no human creeter," gasped Greggs.

"Repeat after me then," begun Tom. "I solemnly swear."

"I solemnly swear," followed the three in chorus.

"That I will never cross your track for evil again."

"That I will never cross your track for evil again," rang the ludicrous unison in reply.

"And that I will never kick a poor man when he's down."

The chorus took up the words faithfully.

"But will help him to his feet."

Thus the chorus.

"And I ask your forgiveness."

Greggs, Pete and Josh all mouthed the choking words as carefully as if they were saying their prayers.

"So be it!" exclaimed Tom.

With that he hurled the little glass jar of phosphorescent fire with a crash and spatter against the door. It shattered into a thousand fragments and cast up a spangle of creeping blotches on every hand. The tongues of ten thousand demons seemed to fork and dart from door and posts, and countless eyes of blinking devils shone from the hay and straw around.

The three big fools fairly yelled with terror and rolled upon the floor, hiding their eyes. Josh, poor fellow, actually rolled and dragged himself under a pile of old rails in the brackets at the corner.

With a burst of laughter Nicholas and I, who could

not be kept silent longer, made the outer darkness ring. Tom started, but instantly remembered whom the voices represented. He had been so much absorbed as evidently to forget that we were within a hundred miles of the scene.

"Do you hear that?" cried Tom. "The demons are laughing with disappointment. They expected to get you all three. In the lower world things go just contrary to what they do in this good world of mercy. Devils weep when they are glad and laugh when they are sad. Good-by."

With that Tom grasped his traps, shook his bundles together, sprung through the door and left them.

We met him outside, and softly retreating, soon had the boy remounted; he and I turned heads toward Montpelier. As I think of the affair now, after all these years, the whole incident seems the most absurd play upon the ignorance and fears of three guilty consciences I ever remember to have met with.

"Tom," I said at length, "what next?"

"Next is that man's revenge. I have made a fool of him. He will never forgive me. I must fight one more battle with him; next time in the school. He will try to disgrace me among the boys. Then I shall be justified in sending him to the law's revenge for this night's work. Halloo! There are the boys!"

Sure enough. About a dozen of the school-boys now splashed through the gloom, each bearing a torch. We went back to the town in the splendid triumph of a torch-light procession.

As we separated at Tom's door, long after midnight, with hurrahs and songs, the neighbors evidently supposing only a students' lark being in process, out flew Miss

Bessie. Tom caught her up in his arms. The child said:

"Tom, a beautiful young lady drove up to the door to-day. Her father got out and left this card."

As the brave boy read it his pale face flushed. Handing it to me he remarked, as I studied the name of Mr. C. B. Kearsarge, Sadie's father:

"I wonder if it's for good or evil. But I am dying for sleep. Good-night, boys, and you too, sir, if you will insist on going to your hotel. I'll see you, if you'll let me, in the morning, and tell you what more is in the wind."

## CHAPTER IX.

### MAKE OR BREAK.



THREE months later Tom and I sat in his cosy parlor, the school-books laid aside for a moment.

"I have come to say good-by, Tom. I must be off for Boston this evening. What meant that card of Mr. Kearsarge's, left here after your last escapade?" I said.

"I haven't heard yet, sir. The gentleman writes me he will be again in town to-day. There is his carriage now. Just sit still and let us see."

Directly in bustled Mr. Kearsarge, his gray whiskers bristling about his stately red face, his gloved hands toying with the heavy watch-chain suspended like a limp hawser about his portly front.

"This is Tom Seacomb?" said the visitor very abruptly.

"Yes, sir, that is my name. Will you have a seat?" answered the boy politely. "But first allow me to present my friend, Mr. Bolton, one of your summer neighbors at the lake-side."

"Ah! I am happy to make the acquaintance. We have often heard of each other," Kearsarge answered, in a courtly way, but softened from the brusque address he had given the boy.

After a few moments of genial conversation Mr. Kearsarge, in a nervous sort of a way, remarked:

"I should prefer to speak to Tom alone—eh—if——"

"Of course. Mr. Bolton, I am sure you will oblige us by stepping into the next room," answered Tom.

The old and sunken door gave so little privacy, even when closed, that the visitor should have been warned; for he must have noted the streaming sunlight through the crevices. The days of the old mansion had been many, and its stately glory had departed. I even ahemed and coughed to warn them that I could overhear their conversation, but to no avail.

"My fine fellow," begun Kearsarge, "I understand you are quite a business man. How goes on this express?"

"Well, sir, we are making a living, and are now running two double-teams each way daily."

"Young fellow, you have got to get out. I've determined to build a railroad straight across from the capital to the Connecticut River. What will you sell out your charter for?"

"This is rather abrupt, sir," responded Tom.

"Well, talk business. You are a boy. Your charter, I understand, is vested in two or three old men here in town and farmers along the line, you being a minor; but you are the brains of the thing. How much will you take?"

"I am a boy, to be sure; but you profess to be a gentleman."

"Now no nonsense! What'll you take? Or I'll break you. Just as you please."

"Mr. Kearsarge, I can make five thousand dollars a year out of that express line yet. But you could not have it for one hundred thousand dollars. I wish you good-morning."

"You don't know much about business, young chap.



I'm not going to leave you so. You are very plucky. If you were only older I'd put the whole enterprise in your hands. I rather like the timber you are made of. But don't you see that I can make or break you? Can't you see that it is for your interest to make friends with me?"

"Mr. Kearsarge, I am old enough to take care of myself; that you will find out. I see that you discovered somehow that my express company is only the entering wedge for the railroad. You have got on the track of the effort which I induced certain gentlemen to make before last winter's legislative committee, looking toward a charter for the road. You probably also know that we have not yet succeeded, but have the inside track, which is the next best thing for next winter. You have discovered, I suppose, that the commissioners cannot be induced to act on your scheme while ours is pending. The summer is approaching, and you want to crowd your plan to the pick and shovel. You cannot frighten me. I don't believe you can scare the men whom I have induced to take up this scheme."

"But, my boy, these men will throw you overboard. They will hardly give you an engineer's place. I'll do the handsome thing by you, if you'll help me freeze these old farmers out. They would abandon the whole enterprise if you were only to make one of your bright speeches to them, and say that there was no money in it," said Kearsarge.

"Then you will pick up what they throw down," said Tom.

"Why, yes. You just tell them that the one-horse express don't pay, much less a railroad. That discourages a lot of farmers. You could make one speech

in a town-meeting that would knock the town's subscription to the stock higher than a kite. Then you and I will gobble the charter that they refuse to urge before the commissioners."

"And what will you give me to lie like that, prove false to my friends and all honest men?"

"Oh, don't use such hard names. Business is business. I'll give you twenty shares in the road. That will be equal to about twenty thousand dollars."

"Is that the way you would talk to a man of full age?"

"Why, confound it, yes. I've got to get this thing away from a lot of Green Mountain numskulls some way. There's money in it. I mean to build and own that road. I've seen the thing for years past, as I've been up here rustivating summers. The time is ripe. You are a smart boy. You have gotten your plan and friends in ahead of me. It's lucky for me that you are not of age, or I'd have to pay you more."

Very cool, and white as marble, Tom stood.

"One question more. Is this gobbling of the weak, this freezing out of the inexperienced, this make or break rule, the process by which Sadie Kearsarge's father has made his vast wealth?"

"What under Heavens has my daughter to do with this? She is a tender-hearted girl who taught you to read, I believe. She wouldn't recognize your face on the street to-day," answered the proud man, his irritation getting the better of his persuasion; for Sadie's kindness and proud interest in Tom had been a provocation to the man. He had even watched her mail, in their elegant city home, to discover if the daughter of so lofty a family had carried her philanthropy so far as to correspond with the "poor-house brat."

"Well, Mr. Kearsarge, I have but one thing to say to you. I am a boy, but you are not rich enough to buy me. Good-day."

"Are you crazy?" cried the man. "Then I'll crush you."

"Good-day, I say. You must understand me," replied Tom.

The rich gentleman slammed the door and was gone.

Tom and I sat long conversing after Mr. Kearsarge's departure.

"Is this the way men treat each other in the world?" asked the noble boy.

"I am afraid it is," I replied. "It is true, is it, that you have pushed the scheme of the railroad thus far?"

"Yes. I have addressed the farmers along the line, night after night, during last winter. We have had a dozen meetings, at taverns and post-offices. A company has been formed. Our application is ahead of this old skinflint. I was to be the real secretary, though another man was the nominal officer, in the corporation application. I am to survey the route. I feel competent. I have made good progress in school. I am the father of that enterprise, and it shall go through."

"That's right. If I were not myself a poor man to-day, after the panic of last winter, I would stand with you," I replied.

"What will he do to break me, as he calls it, do you think?" queried Tom.

"He may attack your personal character, or in some similar way attempt to destroy the credit and hopes of the new organization in the money market or among the moneyed men of the community," I answered.

"He will try to assail me through the school. I am

on best of terms with the principal and all the professors. I am a good scholar. It is by this that I have so largely won the respect and confidence of the city here, and the farming community beyond. You see the professors look upon me with pride, if I do say it. They say no boy of my age has ever done what I have done," Tom went on to say, talking in this vein at some length.

"And what can he do to injure you in your school life?" I asked, as I sat and mused.

"This, if he pleases: He can set the richer boys of the school, who are envious of me and even now call me an upstart, on some scheme to hinder me, or so vex the life out of me that I shall fail in my leadership of the class, or in the prize I am trying to gain, or in my express business. I may have to choose between business and school. He can freeze me out by starting a rival line of express, which, of course, I should have to fight; and yet, as my capital is small, perhaps he could kill me, as he calls it."

"Well, my boy, God always defends the right, only give Him time. Believe in that and wait. It is written in the Book you reverence, 'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.'"

"Yes; there will be lively times this spring term as we come up for examination. With truth on my side, I defy them all. The rich man may find out that the boy who presumed to attract the attention of his fair daughter is good stuff after all."

## CHAPTER X.

### TOM'S TRIUMPH.



TIME WENT on. Occasionally as my business called me through Montpelier, flying back and forth between Boston and Montreal, as I was obliged to do that year, I dropped in on Tom. The financial world had suffered another shock. Railroad building was not profitable in any part of the country. All enterprises of that kind halted, waiting for the turn of the tide. Tom's farmer friends hesitated. Kearsarge, to my certain knowledge, had his hands full elsewhere. But I could see that the next spring would be his time to strike. The tide would then be upon the turn, but not enough for any but shrewd men to detect it. It would be just the juncture in which to squeeze out a faint-hearted company.

It was also the completion of Tom's course at the academy. Three years would have passed, and he would have reached his seventeenth year of age and more.

The boys at the school had been obliged to let Tom pretty well alone. One after another had dropped out of the Overland Express. Tom now owned more than one-half the shares. He had steadily made money. So did the five others who still held to and trusted in his leadership. The faint-hearts all hated and were bitterly envious of Tom and his handful of friends. Many changes had taken place in the school. New boys had come in. All these were cool toward the "upstart"

who was "always on the make," as one wealthy fop from New York City had put it.

Tom had grown to be the most splendid-looking young fellow I ever met. He worked like a slave. Fifteen men were under his employ, now that, by the reduction of the original company's voluntary service, it had to be largely replaced with hired help.

The business had grown, though slowly. Tom still had the railroad in view. In two months he would be graduated and ready to devote his whole time to changing the Overland Express Company into the M. & R. Railway Company.

As I entered the house I found Tom's poor old father sitting in the sunny, ancient porch. A beautiful girl stood at his side. It was the sister. The brave boy had united the family—all except the wretched mother, whose name was never mentioned except at evening prayer, for Tom now run the establishment, and Tom's Best Friend was daily worshiped there.

It seems Tom had purchased the grand old mansion. The house was worthless—a mere ancient, pretentious ruin; but the lot was valuable. Busy and skillful hands had somehow managed to make the great dwelling fit for habitation, and at the first glance it seemed quite stately.

Tom came dashing in from his morning ride on Breeze as I entered the gate, carpet-bag in hand.

"My dear Mr. Bolton, come in. You are just in time for another of my battles; as you remember, we saw it thickening many months ago. It has been a long time coming. Say nothing before father and Bessie."

After a salutation to the others, Tom begun, as we sat alone:

"To-morrow is the prize contest in Greek and Latin orations. The man who makes the best translation is king of this school. There is to be a great party at the principal's house in the evening, and the victor will be the lion of the occasion. Now what do you suppose I found to-day?"

"Well, what?" I answered.

"I found that some one had entered my room, opened my drawer, substituted three false sheets in my work, and carefully refolded and sealed up the package."

"The scoundrels!"

"Yes, and more. One of those false sheets was a literal copy from an English translation, as if I had been dishonest and fool enough to use such help to gain the prize."

"What have you done about it?"

"Done! spent the whole night, sir, without a wink of sleep, in correcting my work, and in three hours more I will meet the crowd in the examination-room and whip them all out."

That afternoon the great room of the town-hall was full. Ladies and gentlemen, visitors from far and near, official and unofficial, were present. Flags and banners hung around the hall. As we passed up the stairs I noticed the contemptuous looks upon many faces of the pupils as they caught sight of Tom and myself. A few were friendly, but most of them were cold and miserably spiteful.

"Tom, my boy, you will find the world just like this all the way through. It hates the successful man."

"I know it, sir; and it hates the man who comes up from nothing, as I have. Why, do you know that other poor boys like myself are my most inveterate foes? I

should suppose that my success in life would be the sign of hope to them; but it isn't so."

It seems that the whole story of poor Tom's lowly origin, the disgrace of his wretched mother, his almshouse escapade, and the false suspicion of theft, had all been fully noised abroad till the school knew it by heart.

"And I have learned, too, that a fellow has got to acknowledge his whole life. I thought I should leave the old life when I came to school; but it is all brought out, now that I am worth noticing at all," musingly said Tom, as we paused in the cloak-room.

"Yes, that is all true," I answered. "A successful man must expect that. He will be put under the microscope. But that is all an unintentional compliment to you. Who cares to inquire about the pedigree of the most of these fellows here; they are not worth it. The whole school is in an excitement over you."

A knot of fellows stood in the corner, trying on gloves and arranging their locks.

"Every one of them wears gloves his father bought for him," said Tom to me, drawing on his own. "But my father wears gloves I bought for him. Thank Heaven *I* paid for everything on my back. I ordered this suit from Boston. How does it look?"

I was bound to say that, with his elegant dress-coat and doeskins, his patent leathers, his white kids, his wavy, short-cut hair brushed back from a shapely forehead, erect, firm upon his feet, he looked like another being instead of the ragged little fellow who three years before had begged me for a supper.

As we stood there a messenger-boy run in with an errand from the express office.



"Tom, you are doubly burdened to-day. Your great business is on you, even while you battle for school-day prizes."

"Yes, sir. Business must go on just the same. Since I saw you early this morning I have spent two hours at my office down town. If I was not a strong boy these extras would tell on me, would they not? Thank God for good health. No cigars nor wines for me. My life is exciting enough without these to play upon my nerves."

While Tom stepped across the hall to offer his arm to the beautiful Bessie, his sister, I was left a moment within ear-shot of the chatting knot in the corner. I recognized one of them as the fellow Crompton who first sold out his shares to the ready Tom months ago. He was one of the contestants also. The son of a very rich man, a spendthrift of the very worst order, he had been Tom's bitterest foe. He was a sort of leader among the aristocrats of the school. He said:

"Egad, we've fixed him! When he comes to read another man's English it will be an awful give away."

"He'll stop, all confused, when he runs across strange handwriting among his papers," said another.

"Of course he will. He'll get mad over the trick, and that will break him up also. See! There may be a scene; but, at any rate, we have knocked him into pie for this prize."

"And is Miss Kearsarge here?"

"Why, yes. You see her father is invited, being on a visit to the governor."

"Whew! You don't say the governor is going to be here."

"Yes, sir-ee. Big time, boys! You know this is the

great day of our course. And that Tom Seacomb may be the best scholar; but his failure and attempt to cheat to-day will ruin him for graduation-day honors."

"There he is now. Mighty pretty girl that sister of his. Zounds! Isn't she tastily dressed. Does he dress her, too?"

"Oh, yes. He's trying to drag his whole family up with him, I believe, except his mother. She ran away with another man, you know. A low crowd. Beggars on horseback, you know."

"You scoundrel!" hissed Tom, who had come near enough to hear the last remark. "Whose horse does the beggar ride but his own?"

Crompton's face flushed; his hands clinched. But he was afraid to say more. Besides, just then the Governor of the State and his party swept up the broad stair-way, occupying all attention. As the distinguished group moved near us, I caught sight of Kearsarge, with the governor's wife and his own daughter Sadie upon either arm. The fair girl was radiant in a most striking beauty of person and dress. Her eyes seemed to be scanning the company, searching with a furtive yet sincere interest for the ragged boy she had known by the borders of Lake Champlain. She taught him how to read. Was she thinking of that? This boy was even attempting to meet and match her imperious father's iron will in the open markets of the world. Was she thinking of that? She had been forbidden even to correspond with him. Could there be any emotion deeper than passing interest in a former pupil? I was sure I detected something more; and especially now when the movements of the leisurely throng brought Miss Kearsarge face to face with the young fellow and his sister as they halted.

With a sudden movement the girl turned back from her father's escort and presented her hand.

"Tom—Mr. Seacomb, I mean—I wish you joy of this evening, and a triumph."

"Thank you," said Tom, flushing so that he looked handsomer than ever. "You were ever my friend. God bless you. This is my little sister Bessie."

When Mr. Kearsarge turned to regain his daughter's arm she was bowing to a young lady; only this, so he thought. Tom was just within the kind concealment of the door-way. In a moment more Miss Sadie was borne along with the honorable company to their appointed seats.

The speaking begun. Each pupil, at the tutor's call, came upon the platform, read his theme, received his applause, and picked up his boquet. The honorable judges sat with sapient looks in the seats beneath the stage, and after each contestant these wise men put their heads together and their estimating pencils upon paper.

The contest had gone on for some time, when a tutor came down the aisle directly toward me. In an easy-chair, placed at the end of the settee just at my elbow, sat one of the professors. The approaching tutor bent over him and begun to say:

"I hear very painful news about young Seacomb. A note has been handed me which purports to come from 'A fellow-contestant,' and which accuses your wonderful Tom with dishonesty in the preparation of his theme."

"Oh, nonsense!" whispered back the professor. "You know now, Mr. Callihan, that you never liked Tom. I shouldn't pay the slightest attention to an anonymous note."

The tutor, himself a young fellow just from college,

who knew nothing but his books, dandled his programme in his hands, played with a sickly mustache, and looked around with an air of vanity upon the crowded audience. He seemed irresolute. At length the professor pulled him down nearer and whispered:

“For Heaven’s sake, Callihan, don’t relate this silly story to the principal. You know he doesn’t like poor Tom any too well, and I am afraid he would prohibit his speaking. That boy’s as honest as they make ’em. He cannot be a liar. Somehow or other the school, and the town too, have been mentally poisoned toward that young fellow of late. Let him alone. He’ll bear off the honors.”

But I noticed that the tutor within fifteen minutes was buzzing the principal as he sat in his chair of state upon the stage.

I also noticed that when soon the programme announced Tom’s name, eighth on the list of speakers, that the next name was called out in his stead. I looked at Tom in his place on the platform. The eyes of half the school were on him too. His face was pale, the firm lips drawn firmer than ever with the conscious indignity. The sympathies of the pupils were evidently all one way, and that against the brilliant boy. The commotion around the principal’s chair subsided. The tenth and eleventh speakers took their places and finished. The principal slowly arose and begun to say:

“Ladies and gentlemen, friends and patrons of the school. Our contest now draws to a close. The judges will retire; and while we spend a few moments in social conversation they will take their vote upon the merits of the several speakers. I have excused one of the names upon the programme——”

"Mr. President," said Tom, rising in his place, "one word, if you please."

"Mr. Seacomb, I had supposed one of the tutors had explained to you our action. You can sit down."

"Not so, honorable sir, if you please. No one has approached me. I am perhaps the only person on this stage who has not been approached and informed of your intention. I claim my right to be heard. This is all a miserable business by some one to dishonor me. I do not charge you, sir, with any such intent, though what your sympathies may be the audience will judge."

"You can be seated, Mr. Seacomb!" thundered the principal.

"You will allow me to say," replied Tom, in courteous tone and with provoking coolness, "that you commissioned us twelve young gentlemen with hiring this hall and arranging for these exercises. I bear my share. It may be my last word as a pupil; though you will probably think differently of me when all the facts are known. I am a citizen, in a public hall, and hold in my hand the receipt of the city officer for the rent, every cent of which I happen to have advanced in payment. It will depend therefore upon the audience alone whether I am heard."

"Go on! go on!" rang from different parts of the hall.

The principal, in a helpless sort of a way, as became an imbecile unfitted for his place, stood rumpling his papers in nervous hands.

In a few well-chosen words Tom then related the evidences of enmity which had come to his knowledge. Scarcely had he finished when the professor near me arose and seemed about to tell what had come to his ears. But in fact he only expressed the general wish that the

young gentleman should be accorded his opportunity to speak. Evidently it was not good discipline for a professor in public to expose all the inner workings of ignoble motives among the staff of teachers.

Tom now unfolded his theme. In clear, beautiful English he repeated one of Cicero's grand orations. The sentences flowed like music from his lips. The audience were spell-bound by a master. Superior in everything I had known him to undertake, Tom was not less so in oratory. As he closed, the great bars of setting sunbeams fell across the room and about the speaker. With the last words the enchained audience sat a moment in perfect stillness. Then a burst of applause filled the room and echoed and echoed again. Young ladies waved their handkerchiefs. Men threw up their hands to give greater emphasis to renewed hurrahs. The faces of his enemies were a study. The wonderful presence of that boy had won for him the hearts of nearly all present. It remained to be seen who should carry off the awarded honors, but the popular honors Tom already enjoyed.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A NIGHT OF SURPRISES.



THE LIGHTS of evening gleamed upon the brilliant scene. The collation had been discussed; the music had discoursed entertainment as time slipped away. Still the committee did not reappear with their decision. Most of the guests had departed to reappear again at the principal's great reception in the evening. Evening? It was not that. If we were to be present at the later festivities we must go. Bessie, Tom and I were cloaked and coated, when in the half-empty hall a tutor's voice sounded, saying:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the committee will announce and award the prizes this evening at the principal's house."

Under the starlight Tom's carriage, hired for the occasion, bore us first to his own dwelling, where we took in the boy's old father, dressed in his best, and later on to the great party. It was after ten o'clock when we entered. The rooms were full to overflowing. The foremost citizens with their families were thronging there. As we pressed our way along the halls and stairways, Tom's face seemed so sad and worn that I said to him:

"You seem to have the weight of the world on your shoulders to-night, young fellow."

"Yes, Mr. Bolton. The crisis of my young life is come. If this great community do not yield their sense-

less prejudice against a poor boy who has simply tried to use what talents God has given him, why Kearsarge will crush me, public opinion will set against my railway scheme, the commissioners will look upon my plans as the wild dreams of a hair-brained youth, I shall lose——”

“Well, you may say it to me. You will lose Miss Sadie. You are hoping to win her by beating her proud father and compelling his respect. Well, cheer up, Tom. It is always darkest just before day.”

“Yes, sir. I will never give up, even if they all turn against me here to-night. I’ll do it yet.”

Many were the averted looks and glances of haughty disdain upon the young “adventurer” as he led his aged father through the rooms, proud to own him sire as ever was Joseph when he led Jacob before Pharaoh. I came directly after with the sister. I remember it all as if it were yesterday. And these three members of a family but yesterday in poverty, lifted up by the unaided hands of the son and brother, were as fair to look upon as any in all that grand procession. But they were victims of popular envy, popular jealousy, a causeless popular dislike. It was the hardest trial Tom had yet met, and I knew that Mr. Kearsarge was mainly the author and sustainer of all this social enmity. His great wealth made him the idol of all the snobs in the town; this made it easy for him to fan the natural jealousies of school-boys and girls in a tower-wide flame.

After we had paid our respects to the host, who, of course, sought to hide his chagrin at Tom’s afternoon victory by the smiles of good breeding, though empty and cold, there was nothing to do but wait; and we stood in a little knot together, neglected by all save the



five young fellows who were Tom's partners in the express business. Even these old friends seemed to feel the universal shadow that beclouded poor Tom and all who clung to him.

"They all say," broke in good Charley Ketridge, "that of course you will not get the prize, Tom; that it would be a downright shame if you did."

"Yes?" says Tom. "Well, Charley, if the judges should happen to award it to me we would be able to carry it off, would we not?"

"Indeed we would, if the street was full of rowdies," hotly replied another of the young partners.

"You forget, gentlemen, that this is polite society," put in the gentle Bessie, who really seemed half-apprehensive that the opposition to her brother might take physical shape, so had her nerves been wrought upon.

The boys laughed in gay banter, one of them saying:

"You need not fear any scenes here. Fair eyes may dart fire, but fair arms will not snatch bank-bills. Let's see; how much is the prize? One hundred dollars, I believe."

"Yes, that's it. And you are correct in regard to Tom's place and time of danger," said Ketridge. "I saw Greggs enter the bar-room of a low tavern here in town to-day. We fellers had better go home with you to-night, Tom. The ruffian can be hired to do anything."

Tom was startled and so was I. But he had no time to inquire further, for the music now ceased, and the principal of the school stepping to the front begun to address the company. Directly in my range of vision stood Sadie Kearsarge, leaning on her father's arm. I could not but study those beautiful features to discover,

if I could, how much ground for hope Tom really had that she entertained for him more than a benevolent interest. Stern and cold the father's face; a look of triumph already assured in his eye. Tender and solicitous the face of the daughter; a look almost of prayer, as if her pure faith was uplifting this friendless boy for God's blessing. Yes, a look of pain it was, in its consuming anxiety, while her eyes seemed to be afraid to turn full on the object of her thoughts, who stood supporting his aged sire, trembling and broken by his side. I was satisfied. It was all right, if Tom could humble the haughty senior. There are some men whose respect can only be won by being knocked down. Kearsarge was such a man. His hand in markets had leveled many and the most; hence he despised men in general. A few men along the path of life had leveled him—a few; hence his friends were few. The men whom he revered were few. Would Tom succeed against this Croesus?

The principal begun to say:

“Ladies and gentlemen: Our committee of award have placed the results of their kind labors in my hands. I take this occasion to thank these distinguished gentlemen for their interest in our academy, which we hope will more and more be cherished as one of the most precious belongings of our town and State. May I not say State, and hope State? Fellow-citizens, this is your own school. We are your humble servants. I had intended to speak at more length, but—but the lateness of the hour, I may say the lateness of the hour and the joyfulness of our greetings—may I not say the joyfulness of your greetings?—forbid. Ah! forbid.

“Mr. Thomas Seacomb. The honorable gentlemen

have adjudged you worthy of the first prize for the best Greek translated oration and its delivery."

This was all. A hush fell on the assembly as the professor finished his halting and evidently unwilling address. Tom stepped forward, still carrying his father proudly on his arm, and took the package of money with a polite bow. Money? Better than thousands of gold pieces was this intellectual and social triumph of the friendless boy. There were as yet no cheers. The blow to society's small vanity was too stunning for a gracious and ready yielding of applause. At length the boys around Tom—his partners—began the clapping of hands. Instantly some of the more generous and less informed of the audience joined in. They knew no reason why not, good souls; they were of the poorer class of citizens, and not in the secret of the boy's unpopularity. Miss Sadie Kearsarge was not to be restrained. Her two white hands clapped merrily. Her father frowned. Altogether the cheer was pretty near a failure.

I stood congratulating Tom, the honest fellow brimming with satisfaction and succeeding well in cloaking the keen elation from a victory which meant to him a conquest of life's destiny. The boy simply kissed the tearful, upturned face of his sister, and clasped the trembling hands of his father, who needed all his son's assurance to calm the shaking nerves of a tottering frame. The elder Seacomb, indeed, most stirred my sensibilities. The fortunes of life had gone so hard against him that he was but a mere wreck at fifty years of age. He seemed to find it hard to realize that his son's career was not all a dream, from whence some rude moment would soon awaken them all.

The old man—for such he seemed to be—smiled half-emptily, then seeming to appreciate the reality a little, laughed outright with a child-like and natural pleasure which was better than all medicine to his weary soul.

“This is a happy hour, Mr. Seacomb,” I said, thinking to relieve his embarrassment by entering into conversation with him.

“Yes, yes, Mr. Bolton. You love our Tom, too, don’t you? I know you do. He’s a smart boy, a good boy, our Tom. God bless him. Don’t you think he’ll succeed in life?”

“Indeed I do, sir. He has this night succeeded for life. You and Bessie will never know want again. You will be honored in this town, sir. The best citizens will be proud to welcome your family.”

A sudden cloud seemed to flit across the old man’s face as if the mention of the family meant more to him than to me. The great disgrace of his home, that shame which had broken him down almost to imbecility, and blighted, as he felt, the future of his children, came like a black wind into his memory. The abandoned mother of his son and daughter! I did not show that I read his thought, and he was soon chatting cheerily with me as before. Tom had given him over to me quite, while he introduced his sister to the mayor and his wife, who had crossed over to offer congratulations. I saw, too, that Miss Kearsarge had stolen up to the mayor’s wife, whom she knew, and, beaming with genuine delight, was mingling her praises with theirs. The elder Kearsarge still stood aloof, by the piano at a distance, as if in an expectant mood.

The question flashed upon me, was this powerful enemy indeed expecting anything? Was there to be one

blow more? Hardly had the thought taken shape in my mind when there was a sound of excited voices in the hall of the front doors.

"I say get out wid yees all! Perlice! perlice!" shouted the voice of the faithful Milesian who acted as porter at the door.

Instantly every eye was turned in that direction; all the hum of conversation ceased. Then came through the portals, pushed on by rude hands, the miserable form of a drunken woman. She staggered to the center of the room, and fell in a heap of foul rags at Tom's feet.

A coarse voice sounded through the open window:

"That's his mother. Wants to kiss her boy."

The poor creature herself half-rose up from the floor, and staring quickly around, laughed out in maudlin tones:

"Yes, I'm his mother. I came to find my boy. They say he's rich, they do."

And again she sunk to the carpet. I had caught sight of the face as she had turned it upon us for that one moment. It was the original of that strange beauty which shone in the faces of Bessie and Thomas Seacomb; but, oh, how haggard, defaced, and ruined by her sin! It was hid now in the folds of her tattered and offensive garments.

A moment of silence seemed an age. Of course it was a trick to humiliate Tom. The sardonic triumph of old Kearsarge expressed itself in a contemptuous smile, as he stood at his station still with folded arms. All the other faces expressed blank amazement.

A piercing shriek rung upon the air, and Bessie Seacomb was kneeling over the prostrate form—not of the

mother, oh, no—but the father. The unhappy man had fallen like one dead backward into his daughter's arms.

"Oh, Tom! Tom! father is dying! No, he breathes! Come, Tom, take us away from this dreadful place!" she cried.

The outcast woman still lay in her stupor, almost unnoticed now, in the center of the room.

A score of pitying hands were now offering their ministry to the suffering father and daughter. After all, human nature is not utterly hardened, and the sight and sound of this fair child's agony and a fellow-man's despair had won many hearts to a new allegiance.

In the midst of the confusion Tom had neither moved nor spoken. That first awful cry of a coarse voice from the open window seemed to have been the last that he had heard. Was it Greggs' voice? It had shouted, "That's his mother. Wants to kiss her boy!"

All else seemed to have been lost on Tom. Pale as death, his fine eyes gazing down upon that load of crouching sorrow, it seemed for a moment that he must have ceased to breathe.

Now, advancing to the center of the room, God and his own true heart had given him strength. In a clear, full tone, every word laden with pathetic tremor, spoke Tom the Ready:

"Yes, men and women of this common human family, that is my mother! Look ye all upon it—upon her husband, whom her woes have broken, and upon us, her abandoned children. All of you had mothers, good, perhaps, and true, who taught you how to pray. If any of you suppose that I am shamed by this scene more than I have been that this poor woman was wandering

alone upon God's earth, we know not where you are wrong. Great God! it has been a daily load these years! Think you we are not glad to have found her? Day or night I would have crossed the sea to have seen this face as I do now."

With that Tom stooped down beside his mother. No one moved in all the room. The boy put back the wavy, straggling locks, gray before their time, and looking into the blue eyes that kindly answered to his impurity, seemed oblivious to all the wondering room as he said in broken tones:

"Mother! Mother! Do you not know your Tom? Look up, mother. We will go away from here. Yes, yes, so very, very far away that none of these," as if he now felt the eyes of multitudes upon him, "shall ever see us again."

Then the strong young fellow lifted her in his innocence; her who had so often lifted him before the load of her sin was upon her; and stood for a moment erect with his burden in his arms. There was an excusable defiance in his flashing eyes as he said to us all:

"I have read, in a book which I love, how of old, to humiliate and confound the Lord, wicked men cast down an outcast woman at His feet; and He said, 'Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone;' and beginning at the eldest they all went forth, one by one, who were her accusers. Perhaps it will be so now, while we wait. What! Ye don't? Then, Mr. Bolton and Charley Ketridge, I will ask you to assist my sister and father from the room. Come, mother, let us go."

Tom begun to move toward the door.

"Tom," I said, "it will take a moment to call your carriage, and we must secure your sister's wraps as well

as your own. You are in evening dress and the night is chill."

"I care for nothing but to go," replied the boy. "But let us sit a moment in the ante-room if necessary. Will you go for the wraps?"

The few boy friends of our hero were already gone upon his errands; the carriage was announced seemingly that instant. In a moment the stricken party would be gone. The spectators, at first too much dumfounded to express themselves, now were all astir with a great wave of reaction which had set in Tom's favor.

"Mr. Seacomb," said Principal Langley, advancing to Tom's side, "we are, indeed, human beings, and I hope some of us are Christians. Your action to-night is sublime. May I not say sublime, sir?"

"I thank you. My carriage is ready," replied Tom.

"My dear Miss Seacomb," whispered Miss Sadie Kearsarge, as she bent down over the blushing face of Bessie and offered tenderly to take down the poor child's hands from before her eyes. "Poor child, you must not, will not suppose our hearts are unmoved. We all pray God for you. You at least, and your noble brother and your father, you have nothing to blush for. I—I think more highly of you than ever. What a grand, manful man your brother will make in this wicked world."

But the crushed and benumbed child made no reply.

There were many voices in our ears. There were a hundred exclamations of admiration for Tom. There was a look of miserable confusion and sense of defeat again written on the faces of Tom's foes. The splendid fellow, by the simple truth of his nature, had triumphed again. There was the confusion of a moment; and the two children, with their parents, were at the carriage door.



## CHAPTER XII.

### PRISON DOORS FOR WHOM?



TOM HAD handed in his mother, still but half realizing what these things meant. A throng of school-boys stood about him, silently yet generously sympathizing with him. As the vehicle was now full I was about saying that I would follow on foot. It was, I noticed, exactly one o'clock of the morning. The moon was just sinking behind the hills, and night was heavy with its overcreeping shadows.

Tom was still standing with white-gloved hands and bare head, his overcoat not donned.

"My boy, put on your coat. You will catch your death's cold in this evening dress," I said.

"Wait a moment—I want to be free-handed," he answered.

"What do you mean?"

"I hope it is not wrong. Human nature has borne about all that it can. Greggs is near here. It will not be safe for him to meet me. If he is not prowling hereabouts he is at my own garden gates. I want no coat on."

Just then, in the last cold beams of the moonlight, I saw Greggs' ugly features on the outskirts of the throng. Tom saw the same sight. In a breath he slammed the door of the coupe and shouted to the driver to halt.

With a bound like a wild animal Tom sprung through the throng and fastened his hand on Greggs' throat. It was the first time in all those years of persecution that

the boy had ever actually lifted his hand against his tormentor.

"Villain! scoundrel! Does it choke you? Yes, it bites hard at your accursed gullet, does it not? It is the hand of an honest man upon you. You never felt such a touch and clutch before!"

"Help! murder! Ho——" and the last syllables of Greggs' gurgling cry were still in his throat.

"No, not a man on earth is base enough to help you now! Not an enemy of mine would pull my hands from off you, you torturer of womanhood! For the honor of your mothers, gentlemen, leave this miscreant to me. I would not shed a drop of his blood."

The boys formed a ring of protection around them. Not all the police of the little city could have rescued that miserable man from the grip of the outraged son of that poor mother, who had been hunted up and used as a tool for a bad man's malice on her own child.

"Now, scoundrel, if you have strength to speak—for when one can't breathe a giant grows weak fast, I see—tell me first where you found my mother."

"In Montreal," blubbered out the captive.

"Once more. Answer up loud before all this company. Who put you up to this trick to-night?"

"I put m—myself up to it."

"No; some one helped you. You are too dull for this strategy."

The reply was inaudible. Tom continued:

"Answer loud, like a little man, or as true as Heaven I'll quench your last flicker."

"Kearsarge," replied Greggs.

"Shout it," said Tom.

The man did.

"Now, then, boys, this man marches off with me," said Tom. "Come on."

As soon, however, as Tom released his hold upon Greggs' throat, the stalwart man could not, of course, be mastered by a mere youth. Tom had learned many a resource of the athlete and wrestler in the school gymnasium, though these friendly contestants were different antagonists from this enraged farmer. Greggs sprung upon Tom as soon as he could regain breath, but a score of hands rained blows upon him from every side. The boys simply threw themselves upon him and in a trice had him down.

"Let us have a rope now; one of the driver's halters, possibly," calmly suggested Tom.

The rope was secured. Greggs was bound, thrown upon the box of Tom's coach, between him and the driver. With a cheer the party drove away, as I afterwards learned, first to Tom's lodgings, where the family were set down, then to the station-house, where the boy made a charge against his prisoner for assault upon an intoxicated woman and conspiracy to kidnap her.

The town rung with the accounts of that day's excitements at the academy and the principal's levee. Of course the usual exaggerations, misstatements and counter opinions were heard; but for the most part, Tom was the hero of the hour. The poor boy had kept himself in seclusion for many days, only appearing in public as his business engagements with the express company demanded. Though he could ill afford it, he generally came and went between his house and the office in the hotel in a small, close carriage which he hired. Once or twice he had been publicly cheered and afforded quite an ovation in the corridors of the hotel. Yet even this

new popularity seemed to disturb him, for it was, after all, founded upon the most painful domestic incidents. It seemed too much like pity, and Tom was too proud to trade upon the pity of the community.

The school term closed in due time. Tom never went back to claim his honors as leader of his class. The summer passed, with its usual migration of our various families from New York and Boston back to our country homes about St. Albans. I was thus enabled to often see Tom by running down the fifty odd miles to the State capital. He always met me at the express office or about the hotel. I was never invited to the old house now, where the family lived as if in a hermitage of affliction.

Loving me as I was sure he did, if I was not invited there, I was sure no one was. Walking one evening past the old house, it seemed cheerless and solitary, though the soft, home-light stole out of the curtained windows and told how that troubled group were trying to nourish each other's weary hearts, bleeding with the wounds of years. The boy Tom faced the world for them, and they were unseen.

Tom was making money, but the iron of his humiliation had entered his soul. The great battle was yet to be fought. Like a giant he was bending all his energies to the preparation. Should his friends or Kearsarge have control of the new railroad?

Kearsarge himself had pooh-poohed the idea that he could have had anything to do with so vulgar a row as the production of a drunken woman in a gentleman's parlor. The snobbish community echoed the sentiment. Of course a rich capitalist from New York could have no motive for such an outrage as Greggs' confession had.

charged him with. Of course not. The next day the rich man had gone back again to the great city, scot-free of disgrace. In due time his family came again to be my summer neighbors on the borders of Lake Champlain.

But the man's wires were being pulled just the same; and Tom felt their tightening coils about himself and his simple farmer associates of the railway corporation week after week. The crisis was not far away. The legislature would soon be in session. Even before that one party or the other might succeed in getting the railway commissioners to sanction the old charter or issue a new one.

Greggs still lay in jail, though Tom had made every honest endeavor to have the case brought to trial after the indictment by the grand jury. The scamp had been unable to procure bail. We learned that he had also lost his place as keeper of the Acton almshouse, so that no help came to him from that direction. Why was he not tried? Tom could not tell. Was Kearsarge staving off the presentment at the bar? Was the great man afraid of his conviction?

We also wanted to discover the whereabouts of Josh Michaels, the miserable boy who had been the tool and companion of Greggs on the poor-farm. He had disappeared. Was he present that night at the levee? Did he know who prompted Greggs, and how much the bad wages were? We employed detectives apparently in vain.

At length, one day Tom received a request from Greggs to visit him in the jail. I was requested by Tom to accompany him. As we sat in the cell the unhappy man begun, without preliminaries, to say:

"Tom Seacomb, I'm goin' to confess to yer. I have hated yer without no cause at all, jest 'cause yer were smart. Yer too much for me though. Now see here. It wasn't old Kearsarge as hired me to go arter your old mamma. I jest know, though, that he didn't like yer; was afraid ye'd git arter the gal of his'n. I hated yer, too. See? So when Mr. Crompton, him as likin' the darter, tew, when he said how yer was a low-born, and couldn't I kim for'ard and tell old Kearsarge so; but I said what I know'd about yer mamma. Quicker'n lightnin' Crompton said how he'd give me money to git the poor creeter here where yer's so mighty big and pop'lar. The feller 'ranged it all as how the party was a-comin' off. Old Kearsarge didn't have no hand at all in it. He said as how he couldn't be 'xpected to git down so low, yer know."

"But you confessed to me that Kearsarge had employed you," said Tom.

"Well, now, yer had a tight grip on a feller jest then, and I thought 'twould please yer. All the rich chap had ter dew with this business was that he's jest willin' ter ruin yer as bein' a mere lad as has somehow crossed his path and got some inflewance with folks here in this yere teown."

"You miserable man!" rejoined Tom. "Your employers have cast you overboard. They will now allow your trial to go on. Either they have put this story into your mouth in hopes to soften the prosecution, or you have told her the truth in despair. I don't care which. I don't ask your advice. I can take care of myself. My last battle is near at hand. Within a month you will be in prison."

And it was so.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A HEATED RACE.



IN THE beautiful month of October I was entertaining Tom in my room at the B—— House, in Montpelier. I was congratulating him that one of his enemies, Greggs, was out of the way, and without vengeance on his part. He had just showed me the balance-sheet of the Overland Express for the previous three months. The boy was indeed making money.

“The railway commissioners should sit to-morrow,” said Tom. “I find, however, that by some means known best to influential politicians, that it is to be an adjournment.”

“You will be present whenever the adjournment indicates?” I said.

“Yes, if I can find out when. Our corporators, good, honest farmers from Marshfield, Groton, and Wells River rely upon a certain lawyer here in town to give them warning of any attempt to hold a meeting of which they are unwarned. But I’m afraid that lawyer can be bought. Kearsarge has interested some of the big men of the little capital here in his scheme. There is a pile of money against us, and there’s many a trick to the law.”

“What are you doing?”

“Charley Ketridge, who is one of the main owners with me of the little Overland Express, is to keep watch here to-morrow and telegraph me. I’ve got a copy of

the old, partly-sanctioned charter in my pocket. Day or night I can show that, and show all that I have done with the Overland. These will give me every moral right to a first chance, if those commissioners are fair-minded men, and if I can be present to make my showing when they meet."

"You say telegraph you. Where are you going?" I replied.

"Read this and see," said Tom, tossing me the following note:

"WHITE SANDS, September 30th.

"MR. THOMAS SEACOMB.—*My Dear Sir*: Mr. Kearsarge requests the pleasure of your company at White Sands on Thursday, October 9th, on the occasion of his daughter's birthday festivities. It is to be but a small home party. Please come by the evening train, Wednesday. Carriages will meet guests at the Acton station. Mr. Kearsarge especially desires your presence to drink with him the 'loving cup,' forgetting the past.

"Signed, ED. CROMPTON, Private Secretary."

"Is that a genuine reconciliation?" I asked.

"I am bound to take it so. The fellow Crompton is indeed the private secretary of Kearsarge; has been since graduation. The 9th is Miss Sadie's birthday. I happen to know," added Tom with a boyish blush that made him handsomer than ever. "Mrs. Kearsarge is deceased. The affair may be intended as a surprise to the daughter."

"Well, why are you suspicious? for I can read it in your face," I replied.

"Because any day now may be the day to convene that commission. Mr. Kearsarge might have a business call away, you know, while we children were at play in a birthday frolic, and we would excuse the great banker, of course. See?"



"Well, Charley Ketridge is on the watch. So will I be. Go ahead. The train leaves in half an hour."

"I would invite you to entertain yourself with my Breeze, in a round of these fine hill rides; but, unluckily, I sent the mare out to pasture about fifteen miles up the Central road in Waterbury, last month," replied Tom.

"Never mind me. I'll enjoy myself watching for your interests. Good-by," and the fine fellow was off.

During the afternoon I saw Charley Ketridge, and we both kept a close watch of hotel registers about town, scanning the faces of strangers in our streets, and by various means acted upon the suspicion that Tom had been enticed away to get rid of his ready tongue and powerful pleading for his own rights.

I took a walk down past Tom's old house. The street leading past it was sprinkled with students going to and from the academy. The fall term was in session; but the joyful group of boys who made the old house a home in Tom's day, in preceding years, was not there. The house looked neat, but wore a private and shabby-genteel look of seclusion. The new students in passing, I observed, pointed it out as "The place where that spendid fellow, Seacomb, lived." "His sister, a splendid girl, too." "Some disgrace about the mother," etc., in the usual way of all small gossip the world over.

I saw a beautiful girl walking about the dilapidated grounds, whose flowers were as fair as ever under her tending, and at her side a feeble man, bent and white-haired. I thought I saw that fine face of the mother sitting in the seclusion of an arbor shade, decently dressed and with a look of peace upon her features. I could not resist the impulse to call to Miss Bessie. She came at once to the gate, recognizing me.

"You are all well now? It is long since I have seen you," I said.

"Yes, we are well. I am delighted to meet you. We do not go out at all now. Oh, Mr. Bolton, that terrible night! My poor father fell ill with brain fever, and for weeks we despaired of his life."

"Why, Tom never mentioned it to me, poor child."

"No. Do you know what an angel our mother showed herself while papa was so sick? She is utterly changed now. God has cleansed away the past. Sorrow has brought us joy. We all stood around poor papa for weeks—Tom, mamma and I. How we suffered! But it brought us all back to each other's love again. Tom said it would. But we shall never go out again here. We shall go away, unless——" and the fair young creature did not finish her sentence.

"Unless what, my child?"

"Unless Tom wins his fortune in this fight of his with Mr. Kearsarge. Oh, Mr. Bolton, this great labor of Tom's will kill our boy. He does not sleep more than four or five hours at night. He and Breeze have scoured the country all over, Tom going to talk with this farmer and that rich store-keeper in all these villages. What is it? Tom has used poor Breeze so hard that she's gone away to rest; but my brother will take no rest. It will break his heart to fail."

I tried to reassure the girl, and took my departure. I was not invited into the house. With more interest than ever in the noble young fellow, I went back to keep my watch over the possible stolen-march upon him by his powerful enemies. One step more and that sorrowing family was redeemed to respectability and station in society again. At least the sister and brother, even if

the father and mother should live in the seclusion becoming their long penance and patience, supported in comforts by the faithful son. Pray God the boy does not fail! And the boy himself? To win the victory over the father was to win the privilege of wooing the daughter. Ah, there was more in failure to break Tom's heart than his sister evidently knew.

All the afternoon Charley Ketridge had played the spy upon Squire Nordoff's law office. When I met him in the evening, he told me that this was the attorney whom the farmers' company were trusting, as Tom had mentioned.

"There are three of the commissioners in town," said Charley, "and I have seen one of them with Nordoff. I am sure the legal notice will be posted in some obscure place to-night to comply with the law," said Charley.

"Well, whatever the trick is we may wait without alarm till we see old Kearsarge himself on the ground," I replied.

"There he is now!" exclaimed Charley.

And sure enough the portly figure of the rich man was just alighting from the coaches that came up from the evening train. I stepped into the hall to greet him, but the shrewd wire-puller had stolen at once to his room. While we sat and watched from the waiting-room windows, in came Nordoff and went up-stairs. Within an hour several other well-known men about town passed up the stairs to that chamber evidently.

"Nothing will be done to-night, of course. But, Charley, we must telegraph Tom. What time can he get here in the morning?"

"The first train from Acton will not arrive before 10:30 A. M.," replied Charley, consulting the time-table.

"Go out and see if the legal notices of the meeting are posted."

Charley returned soon, saying:

"It is posted here in the dark of evening. Shame! and the hour is nine o'clock in the morning."

"Then Tom Seacomb must be here to-morrow at sunrise, Charley. Telegraph him. He will find a way, trains or no trains."

Charley sent the telegram. We both signed it, and sat down to think what next to do in the cool of the October evening. I remember it distinctly. I smoked a cigar. Charley chewed the shavings of a pine stick and whittled like a Yankee born. We sat till midnight, but no reply from our Tom.

"A country village is Acton, Charley. I fear our telegram would find no office open after eight o'clock. Then, too, it is five miles out to White Sands from the station," said I.

"Yes. I fear that old Kearsarge has beaten us," replied Charley, in tones of despair.

"Wait and see. It's all we can do. And God defends the right in this world, my boy. His ways are not our ways."

Now, reader, let me tell you how it fared with Tom, as I afterward received it from his lips.

Tom had been met at noon by no less a person than Mr. Kearsarge himself, who had driven down, he said, for the purpose of extending the utmost of hospitality. He had greeted Tom at the Acton station with:

"My boy, glad to see you. I had intended driving back, but we business men can never command our time. See here," and he handed out a letter just received calling him to Waterbury by the next train.

"Now, Mr. Seacomb, here is Mr. Crompton, whom you used to know. He will take my excuses back to Sadie, and she will play the agreeable to you and her other guests. She is a good girl, and knows what an uncertain fellow her busy old father is."

Tom said his first thought was to turn on his heel and take the next return train also; but as Waterbury was mentioned in the letter, and not Montpelier, he concluded to go on. The boy's heart got the better of his head for once. Miss Sadie expected him; he must meet her. And so, with what grace he could, our hero climbed into the dray with the smiling Crompton and went on to White Sands.

Miss Sadie had met them, all smiles. A gay and happy company, not large, had filled the golden hour of afternoon with the happy romps of youth. As Tom and Sadie had stood that afternoon under the grand old chestnuts, the rest of the party having gone a little past them, Sadie had said:

"How greatly your life has changed, Mr. Seacomb, since we first met under the school-house roof yonder."

"Why not call me Tom, Miss Kearsarge? That was my old name. Tom the Ready, you remember."

"I will. Tom, why did they call you the Ready? I have often wondered. Boys nickname each other so oddly."

"Perhaps it was because I was ready to do any honorable thing to accomplish three ends in life," replied Tom.

"I wonder what they were? That's like a girl's curiosity, isn't it?"

"Well, the first was to win my way in life."

"Yes. You boys have to win your way, don't you?"

What are we girls good for, but to be pleasant company about the house? We have no way to win. But the second?"

"To reunite and elevate my family."

"Your sister is a beautiful girl," said Sadie.

And Tom watched her to discover how far she felt the disgrace of his unhappy mother, and he thought he discovered that she was trying to assure him of her esteem and high valuation of himself, notwithstanding all.

"And there was a third object for which you were Tom the Ready," said the laughing girl, looking into the boy's face.

"Yes. Ready to do or dare anything in the right to win you, if I ever could."

She made no reply. The great trees whispered in the October sunshine of the setting day. The laughter of a merry party adown the sloping wood beyond them came up to salute the ears of this happy pair, as, boy and girl lovers, they stood confessed. Finally Sadie said:

"You are not a man yet, dear boy. But all that's before you."

"Take my hand then and let us run back to your father's house together. The rest are going," said Tom.

And she gave him her hand.

As they arrived at the house an hour later, Mr. Crompton stood awaiting them with a jealous frown upon his face. He held a scrap of paper in his hand. The light of Chinese lanterns fully revealed his disturbed look. With an effort at good nature in his tones he said:

"Your guests were beginning to think of an organized search for you, Miss Kearsarge."

"Indeed, Mr. Crompton! What had you to say?"

"That I would lead the search, being quite miserable without you."

"Which I am bound to take for what it is worth. You perhaps knew that Mr. Seacomb and I disappeared together. Could I have been lost with you at hand, Tom?" said the girl archly, looking up into Tom's glowing face.

Before Tom could answer, Crompton, with ill-concealed frown, put in:

"You will pardon me, being as I am one of the servants of the occasion, if I suggest, Miss Sadie, that our guests are waiting and the ices are melting. Shall we go at once to the tables? They have been spread on the lawn, under canvas, as your father directed."

"You are very kind, Mr. Crompton. Go on before us and herald our coming."

And the angry young fellow had nothing else to do but be the literal herald of the hostess and her escort, our Tom, as they advanced among the joyful company amid welcoming cheers.

The repast was half finished when Crompton approached Miss Kearsarge with these words:

"I am pained to be obliged to interrupt you, Miss Sadie—but that telegram. Did I hand it to you?"

"Why, no, sir. You had a paper in your hand as we approached, but you did not give it to me. What is it? Is—is anything the matter with papa? He was ill this morning."

The fellow hesitated. Tom believes to this day that it was Charley Ketridge's telegram to himself which he had held in hand. It was just the thing to give the scoundrel Crompton a hint how to deceive this poor girl.

"I am miserable, Miss Sadie," stammered Crompton.

"I was so shocked and perplexed as to my duty when I received your father's telegram that I——"

"You lost it!" cried the eager and unsuspecting girl. "Find it! No. Tell me what it said!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "Oh, papa! papa! I am all alone if anything happens to you. And he is so good to me. I must go to him!"

"Indeed, that's it exactly, Miss Kearsarge," responded Crompton. "The telegram requested you to come to him; suddenly ill at Montpelier."

"Montpelier?" exclaimed Tom. "He said, sir, that he was going to Waterbury."

Tom suspected mischief, not now to himself, but to the dear girl, whom he believed Crompton villain enough to deceive. But all efforts to dissuade her were in vain. She suspected nothing, and to tell the truth, Tom could not give one good reason why he mistrusted her proposed escort.

He was her father's trusted secretary, to whom it would seem the absent man had sent the summons. The train, the last one south for the night, left in forty minutes. With hasty farewells the rapid journey to Acton station begun. Miss Sadie had turned to Tom to say:

"You will stay to dismiss my guests, will you not, my best of friends?"

Had it not been for this request Tom would have insisted on accompanying her. Again his heart had gotten the better of his head.

Tom saw the last guest depart, and then sat down in the ample library alone. It was now ten o'clock at night. The October twilight had faded quite, and the moon came up to look in at the window. The moonlight had always been a harbinger of good to Tom. So



it shone that night of his struggle and final victory over Greggs at the principal's levee. Tom was thinking of that. Left alone, his mind returned to the grave events of his own life, which hung by a hair these very hours. By some strange impression he felt moved to hasten back to Montpelier.

He afterward said he seemed almost to see Charley Ketridge and myself beckoning to him. Then Miss Sadie Kearsarge seemed to stand out against the night and beckon to him also. His father, mother, and sister joined the group of beckoning hands. Every voice said: "COME!"

The boy awoke with a start. He had been dreaming. But his dreams had taken color from the exciting incidents of the day. That was all. Tom was too sensible to believe in dreams. Yet as he awoke, it being only eleven o'clock at night, he yielded to the impression that was on him. With some difficulty he aroused the coachman at the stable.

"I'm going to board some down freight train, Pete, and get back to Montpelier at once," said Tom.

The fellow stood amazed, but stammered out the information that there was a down freight at about midnight; was willing to saddle a couple of horses and accompany him. In short, Tom caught the train.

The slowly moving freight gave Tom time to cool off his dream ardor. He thought himself a fool. Why was he not then sleeping comfortably in a good bed at White Sands? How would Charley Ketridge know where to address him now? The thought suggested that he knew the telegraph operator at Waterbury, an old school-mate. As the train pulled up at the station Tom run in.

"How are you, Fred?" said Tom. "I half-expected that I should find you here. You run the road by telegraph. No private messages at this time of night, of course."

"Why, Seacomb! How are you? Here's something just gone over the wires for you, at Acton. There's some one at Montpelier who is in distress to find you. We read your name at least three times. And not a minute ago something went past my office from the junction. That's three miles out from the village. You know it's lonely here at night, or even by day, for that matter, and I often amuse myself by reading the messages by the tick as they go past."

"What was that last?" shouted Tom.

"It seemed to be, if I remember, from a woman. It said, 'Come to me, Tom. The scoundrel is deceiving me.' Or something of that sort. A love affair, eh?" replied the operator.

"Tell me where it was dated," replied Tom, in a cold sweat of terror, yet perfectly cool as ever in an emergency.

The obliging fellow hunted up the message along the lines. Several minutes were consumed in the process. At length both Charley Ketridge's message and Miss Kearsarge's were found in full. It seemed evident that Crompton had got off the through train at Montpelier Junction. He was seeking to achieve no less infamy than by force or fright to compel Miss Sadie to accompany him in a flight from her father's house. The young lady had somehow managed to send this dispatch to Tom; perhaps, also, one to her father. It was probable that the couple were waiting at the junction station yet, no other train having passed, and that the young

lady had felt secure enough in the railway station amid passengers not to make a scene.

"How far is it from here there?" asked Tom. "Not more than ten miles, and three in to Montpelier. Breeze! Breeze! Thank Heaven I ever sent you out here. I have a horse at Farmer Blake's, just through the village, at pasture. What a Providence this is!"

And in less time than it takes to tell it, Tom was away half-down the village street. The crawling freight train was still backing and filling at the station when Tom dashed across the iron rails in the glare of the engine's head-light, and away flew the noble brute, refreshed by her recent rest. She wore no saddle or bridle. Her owner had leaped upon her as he found her at the pasture bars. She seemed to be in waiting to carry her young lord the one last ride to victory in love and wealth; for Tom would of course now be able to rescue the girl, and also to sight the church spires of the State capital by sunrise.

It was two o'clock by the strokes of a church bell time-piece as the boy thundered along the village street to Middlesex, and there were yet five miles ahead. The up train reached Montpelier Junction by three o'clock.

Tom guided the mare by the press of his knees and strokes of a hand on her neck. The grand qualities of her pedigree now came out as never before. With long, powerful strides she rose and fell over the ups and downs of the hill country. Her rider spared her at every descent, but gave her full liberty to mount each ascent at full and eager bounds. Along the level stretches she seemed to rollic in the intoxication of her master's own excitement.

Moment after moment passed, hill after hill, and

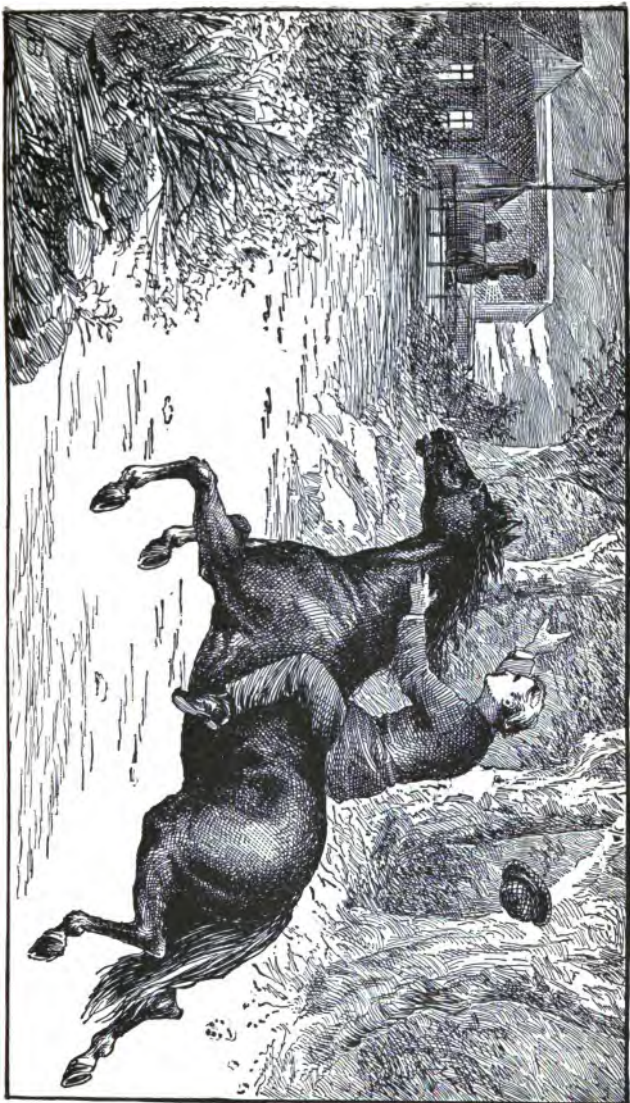
valley after valley. At a fork of the road which Tom knew, he cried:

"Steady now, my bird. It is only three miles more. But we have only fifteen minutes to do it in, if I read my watch right in these low moonbeams."

Tom's idea was to arrive ahead of the Montreal train, so as to secure the rascally Crompton, if possible, whom he believed likely to take flight north alone, even if he did not persuade Sadie to go back as if toward Acton on the plea of repentance, and returning with her to her father's.

The horse was foaming and giving signs of fatigue. There was now a mile yet remaining. The station lights could be seen. Suddenly she stumbled and came to her knees. Tom sprung to the ground. The mare was cut about the legs, but at once on her feet again, her rider vaulted again to his place. One more eager heat, and at the door of the station Tom bounded to the platform. The train was just leaving, but Sadie Kearsarge fell into Tom's arms as Crompton released his hold upon her, and the train moved away.

"ONE MORE EAGER HEAT AND AT THE DOOR OF THE STATION TOM BOUNDED TO THE PLATFORM."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### ON TIME AND READY.



IN THE early light of the morning a spent horse might have been seen stoutly plodding through the bright beams of the breaking day. Tom the Ready would trust his foam-flecked deliverer to no one else, though he had provided a carriage for Miss Kearsarge, which came rolling on and soon overtook him.

From the windows of my room I discovered them as they entered the street, and was at Tom's side as he was proposing to help Miss Sadie from her conveyance.

"Let me go down for my horse, and I will call for you in an hour or so, Miss Sadie. We will then seek your father together. He must be at some one of these hotels," said Tom.

"Tom, old fellow! God has sped you," I cried joyfully.

Charley Ketridge and three or four others of Tom's business friends also drew near and grasped his hands. The lady was an embarrassing presence. Our eyes looked the question, I suppose, and hence Tom said:

"Mr. Bolton, and gentlemen—Miss Kearsarge. Mr. Ketridge, you at least have been introduced before. This young lady has made a remarkable escape from the clutches of a villain. She must be conducted to her room, unless you know where her father is stopping in town."

"He is at this hotel, Tom," replied Charley, "but he

has just gone out, to my certain knowledge. It is near the hour of the commissioners' meeting. You have not time to go home. Mr. Kearsarge is already there before you."

"Then, Tom," interposed Miss Sadie from the carriage window, "let us go to papa at once; you and I together. It will be best for you. I have much to tell papa. He is good at heart, but he has plans that he is trying to carry out that will in some way injure you. Come. Papa shall know what you have done."

Pale and trembling with the excitement of the preceding hours, the resolute girl grasped our hero's arm as soon as he had dismounted

"But, Miss Sadie," I interposed, "allow me to precede you at the office of this commission by a few moments. Tom," I said turning to him, "it is best for me to go first."

Yielding to me, they sat a few moments in the hotel parlor. Ketridge was to bring them word when we were ready for the entrance of the pair.

Around the official table sat the proper officials who had the railway business in charge. Mr. Kearsarge had just risen to say:

"Gentlemen, the hour has arrived. I would like to present to you our scheme for a line from this capital to the eastward."

He talked at some length, and then closed by saying:

"It has been rumored that there is another company in progress of organization, and that the initial papers have been issued looking to their incorporation."

As he came to this portion of his plea I gave Charley the signal. He flew to the hotel near by. I soon heard the sound of returning steps upon the stairs. As Mr.

Kearsarge was finally saying, at the end of his lengthened address:

"But if, gentlemen, there has been at any time such an incipient corporation in existence before the one I represent, it must have failed of all success, for you perceive that no one is here present to speak for it."

Tom entered with Sadie on his arm, saying as he strode forward:

"May it please the honorable committee I at least am here; a mere boy, if you please, but the president of a successful express company, occupying this very line of route. You would not, of course, suppose a minor a proper incorporator; but I have encouraged the formation of rural capitalists in a railway scheme. These gentlemen had intrusted the preliminary papers to an attorney of this town who should be here. But failing that man's presence, I have the documents in duplicate upon my person. Allow me to present them."

And the young fellow laid the package on the great table.

"Papa!" exclaimed the girl at his side, springing now forward and throwing her arms about the rich man's neck; "oh, papa, you wonder why I am here."

"Evidently," responded Kearsarge, coldly offering to unwind his daughter's fond embrace, "you have run from me to this fellow."

The man's face was livid with rage and vexation.

"Not so, papa, dear. I cannot tell it here," cried the girl.

"Tell it here!" roared the father, who evidently thought his daughter's shame could not be kept private, if, indeed, she had eloped with Tom.

Then the girl told all the events of the night.



As she finished, Kearsarge strode across the room with eager face, caught Tom by both hands and said:

“My boy, you have beaten me in business. You have stormed my heart in this great deliverance of my child. I love but few men. I would like to count you my friend. May I, from this day forth?”

Tom the Ready was ready for reconciliation, not pausing to scrutinize too severely the proffered kindness of the hard man of the world. And why should he? He had won the victory. The commissioners recognized his rights. The Overland Express had blossomed, in a few weeks, into a railroad, and Tom was the holder of a respectable amount of stock for a boy. Boy, indeed, he was no longer, but a well-grown youth. Mr. Kearsarge immediately joined hands with Tom, advising, loaning money to him, and forwarding his scheme. He made our hero the offer of Crompton's place as private secretary, after that miserable fellow's flight of the country. But Tom could do better as virtually the managing man of the books in the new railway office, with prospects of high station in reality as soon as his beard should be a little longer grown. Indeed, everybody considered it the boy's road. He had large interests there.

## CHAPTER XV.

### MEETING A GIANT.



OUR NAME is Thomas Seacomb?"

"Yes, sir," answered the young man, looking up from his desk through the wire wicket and wiping his pen upon a sponge, "I am Seacomb." And the bright, handsome face seemed to ask the stranger who he might be, his business and the usual questions of a ready clerk's glances.

"My name is Shandy. You have had a letter or two from my private secretary," said the gentleman, as he cocked his rather small head one side, tapped his boot with a close-rolled umbrella and sharply scanned Tom with keen, gray eyes, which did not look you squarely in the face.

"Ah, Mr. Charles Shandy. Yes, sir. I am very glad to see you," said Tom promptly, stepping into the outer office and extending his hand. "Pardon me, but you know I never had the pleasure of meeting you. We have only corresponded. Take a chair, Mr. Shandy; it is quite early, and we shall be undisturbed here for an hour yet."

"I can't stop, Seacomb. Happened to be passing south and concluded to wait over one train to take a look at you with my own eyes."

And the cold, gray eyes, once doubtless blue, but faded by fifty years of such sharp, restless using, peeping, spying into all sorts of places, except other men's

faces, these eyes kept glancing everywhere about the apartment, except into Tom's honest countenance.

Tom couldn't help thinking that the eyes, having stopped over one train with their owner for the express purpose of seeing him for themselves, might have taken their privilege openly. Instead of which, the eyes, for the most part, seemed examining his boots, the carpet, the office desk, his modest watch-guard and neck-tie, and only furtively stole what knowledge they really did get of a young fellow's face-character.

"Young man," abruptly begun Mr. Shandy, cocking his polished silk hat and the head under it, "I have been wanting a smart, bright fellow to go down to Brazil for me. My son has met you up here on one of his vacations—though my son don't care much for vacations, my son don't. He's a worker. A pattern young man is my son Charley; most extraordinary boy; never caused me a moment's anxiety in his life; good boy; pious boy, I hope; 'tends right to business. Well, he says you are the sort of chap I want. That's how I came to write you. That is, I dictated the letters. But you might as well know that Charley is at the bottom of your good fortune. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom guardedly. "I had the pleasure of meeting your son last September. He was stopping at a summer hotel which we run in connection with this new railroad of ours. He is not married yet?"

"Married! I guess not. Not one of the marrying kind. No softness about him. Wedded to business, is my son. I'd laugh to see the girl who could tempt Charley to marry. I'd give her a fortune. But I can't seem to get him married. All business—and principle. Loves right and duty. But about Brazil?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, "that's business. Brazil." But the young man's thoughts were of a girl who had actually "tempted Charley to marry," though not intending to do so. A girl whose sweet and noble face, rare grace of character and power to charm wrought of themselves on all who met her. Tom had long ago made as perfect a surrender to her as he could, and she was plighted faithful unto him. It was not her fault that the icy, young calculating machine, Charles K. Shandy, had fallen enamored of her in a September day at the mountain hotel; not Miss Sadie Kearsarge's fault, but rather an unsolicited compliment to her womanly grace that even such a heart was warmed to more than admiration upon a casual meeting. Tom had felt that his fair treasure was safe, yet young Shandy had evidently gone back from his autumn days at the Mountain House with desperate resolutions and illusive hopes. "Now, then, this was the outcome of it all?" So questioned Tom, in his swift thoughts. "He has got a plan for me to go to Brazil, eh? Brazil is not a healthy climate, and is a good way off; further off than this Montpelier office was from the Mountain House; visits rarer than once or twice a week can I make from Brazil. Besides, the fellow knows, doubtless, of Miss Sadie Kearsarge's summer place by Champlain."

But he did not speak.

"I say, young fellow," abruptly begun Shandy again, as Tom did not seem inclined to continue the conversation, "you rather please me. Do you understand the business?"

"I fully understand surveying, if that's what you mean. I know something about railroading and railway construction, for I really planned and laid out this new

road here. If I had my rights I should be more than its cashier, and a partial stockholder this moment. But I am yet young, only twenty-three. Time enough yet."

"Yes, time enough yet, Seacomb," rejoined Shandy. "I never like to see boys get on too fast. That is, faster than—well, you don't misunderstand me. I wish all young men well. But——"

As he did not extricate himself from his unfortunate sentence, Tom wondered if the round head shaking itself was thinking, "I wish all young men well, but only as I can use them, as I use everybody. I, Charles Shandy, of Boston, millionaire."

"Seacomb, I want to run a line of telegraph from the mouth of the Amazon River across the Andes. I want another line to go down the coast to Rio. I believe in time—say ten years hence—a railroad can be built from the city of Para over the Andes, opening up the great forest region full of timber, tropic products, mines, etc., to American trade. I don't know but it may pay to strike right across the vast plains of central Brazil to the capital of the empire. But you see all this has got to be spied out. No fellow knows just what there is in those untraversed regions. We only know the termini; the Pacific ports in Peru, say, and the Amazon's mouth and immediate shore. We know there are silver mines, and tremendous forests that can hardly be got to tidewater. But the privations to be endured, wild animals, tropic reptiles, fevers, ash-heap deserts with no water, awful forests of three or four hundred miles into which a man must penetrate, Indians—well, you see. I wrote more fully the plan. I'm no talker. I've got the idea in my head. Have you?"

"I think I understand," answered Tom collectedly,

"that you foresee the early opening of those South American countries by American and European capitalists, and that you want to be in ahead."

"Exactly. And——"

"And that you want some young fellow who is willing to risk his life and separate himself from the society of his fellow-men for a couple of years, to captain your surveying, prospecting corps."

"Well, that's about it; but——"

"But you may want him to spend ten years there and build your railroad or telegraph lines."

"Why, yes. I'll make it an object for him if the thing is ripe."

"No. You don't make it an object."

"What! Not at five thousand dollars a year? You can't earn three here. You cannot make this road pay. You cannot get married, for instance, now, though——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Shandy," broke in Tom, rising to his feet, "my private affairs are not under discussion. I am not in your service yet."

"Well, well," said Shandy, pulling out his watch and weighing the heavy chain in his hand with the air of a man who has a strong move in the game not yet made, "sit down, Seacomb; don't get excited with me. I'm an older business man than you. The young lady is nothing to me—that is, if you have one in mind, which fact I don't know. Sit down. You will go to the Amazons next week for me, five thousand dollars, five men with you, and all expenses paid. Yes, you will, now; see if you don't." And the cold, gray eyes seemed to be trying to laugh with the rest of the smooth face.

"I do not like your manner, Mr. Shandy. From

a boy I have, unfortunately perhaps, been my own master."

"Oh, a fig for likes and dislikes! You'll go. Have you resigned your place here?"

"Confound you, sir!" exclaimed Tom, with suppressed emotion; "you will make me forget that you are a guest in my office. I'll not go. I wouldn't be in your employ for any sum. Send somebody else to die in Brazil. Good-morning."

"You are in my employ if you continue in this office, young man," quietly put in Shandy.

"What?"

"You have not received the news? No, of course not. But I may as well tell you that I happen to have purchased your friend Kearsarge's stock last night. This, with some which my boy Charley has been picking up among these farmers, makes us the majority. I don't believe much in the road, but it's Charley's notion. How much do you own? Come, I'll buy it of you at your own figures. You see I want you to like me—and go to South America."

Tom walked to the fire-place, leaned his elbow on the mantel and looked down into the flaming brands that danced and snapped in the draught of April winds. Tall, well-formed and the very picture of health, Mr. Shandy could not help admiring him as he stood and brushed back the black, thick locks from a high, full brow, on which trouble was just now writing its usual signs.

But Shandy's gaze was subtle, though admiring—as of an inferior animal that has caught a nobler creature in its snare, and can now afford to wait in silence till the liberty-throes are exhausted and the prey falls

wearied. Tom, never raising his eyes, was digesting many thoughts in brief moments. The years he had toiled to inspire the rural villages with the hope of this road; the years since he was sixteen, that he had himself dreamed of it; the plans to make it a success; the days and nights of labor; the dreams of increasing control, of possible domestic happiness as it begun to pay a living income to himself; and now, just in the turn of the tide, gone! Capital! capital! He is master who has it, and he a slave who has it not. The cowards had sold him out, then—sold themselves out in the moment of fortune turning, and him with the rest. Seven years had he served for his Rachael, and now—— Turning at length to the man of money, he said:

“Mr. Shandy, you and I cannot part just yet, then, it seems. But it will not take long to settle. How much will you give me for my twenty shares in this railroad?”

“Twenty thousand dollars—if you will go to Brazil.”

“I suppose you bought yours for about fifty below par. That’s about the market,” said Tom, as if thinking out loud. “You will give me then, practically, ten thousand dollars over what I could otherwise get for my investment here, and I go off with twenty-five thousand dollars to show for a fortune at the end of my first year in Brazil, if I’m alive.”

“Exactly. Now you talk business. I knew you’d think better of this affair. Money is all-powerful. Now will you write out your resignation of cashiership here, fill out blanks for a meeting of the directors, and make this transfer of stock on the books? I shall not go on to Boston to-day. We’ll fix up this little affair, and see you off first—eh?”



Mr. Shandy pulled out the package of certificates which had given him, as he supposed, the control of the road, and tossed them carelessly through the wicket for examination.

"But suppose I do not please to sell my twenty shares?" continued Tom, still leaning on the mantel and thinking out loud.

"Then I'll ruin you and your road! No nonsense, now. I'll slander your road—my own road more than half. I'll force you to sell for ten on the dollar! What do I care? Charley has got his heart on it and shall have it. I'm going back to my hotel—shall not leave Montpelier until to-morrow. Understand?"

The office door closed. The short little millionaire was strutting up the street, nodding his red bullet-head and scanning the passers-by with his gray, cold eyes, which seemed to see nothing, but saw everything. Of course he would carry his point. He always had in this world. And especially against a boy!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ONE CHANCE LEFT.



O, THEN, it is rule or ruin," spoke Tom Seacomb, the young business man, as he turned about and walked across the office to gaze out of the window. "He would drive me out of the country for the sake of his precious son Charley; and he stops over a train or two for the little job—then he will go on to his great affairs again. He then is a live monopolist! The first big one I ever met. That's the way they squeeze the life out of us young fellows. Mr. Saxel!" It was the book-keeper's name, who had just entered. "The road has changed hands. See if those certificates of stock all bear the name of Charles Shandy."

The book-keeper soon answered that they did, but in a moment more, added:

"Still he lacks ten shares of a majority."

It was the work of a moment to ascertain that Shandy had, indeed, in his too superficial and hasty effort, allowed himself to suppose that he had a majority, when in fact he had not. It could not be long before the error would be discovered.

Just then the superintendent of the road entered. A brief portrayal of the situation followed. What should be done? All the present officers would be, of course, in the same peril of losing their places, if "my son Charley" so desired.

"I see!" excitedly exclaimed the superintendent.

"This road is to be pooled with the Central and the White Mountain, and the big fish eat up the little ones. All one monopolized management. Head offices in Boston. And 'my son Charley' is to have this to play with, to learn how."

"I see more than that. And this young lady will understand it, too," said Tom, as he caught sight of a gay little team, with a beautiful girl holding the lines, halting at the office door.

"Good-morning, Tom," she said cheerily, as Seacomb stepped politely to her vehicle. "Why, you look as sad as a deserted lover this bright morning. It isn't your usual look when I drive past."

"No, Sadie; we are in a little trouble here."

And then, because she was a wise little woman, with her twenty years, and Tom's best earthly friend, who had found him a poor-house beggar-boy, and taught him to read in her Sunday-school among the hills; because, moreover, her proud old father had at last consented that she should soon be Tom's wife if Tom could prove that he was likely to be rich; because their mutual hopes were bound up thus in the success of a railroad, in this prosaic age, instead of a tournament like the knights of chivalry, the young man told this young girl the news of the morning.

"Sadie, it was your father who sold us out," added the boy sadly.

"Oh, Tom! But father is father. Perhaps it is his last proof of you. You outgeneraled him once when you got the charter for building the road. Can't you do it again? He would then be forced to admire you forever," exclaimed the fair woman.

"Seacomb"—it was the superintendent speaking from

the office door—"if we had five thousand dollars we could get the ten shares that would put us in power again from an old farmer up in St. Johnsbury."

"I'll loan you the money," exclaimed Sadie. "Go! No, telegraph."

"It is of no use to telegraph to that old dullard. He lives five miles from the village," said Tom. "But how did you find out that he would sell?"

"Here it is advertised in the morning newspaper," put in the book-keeper, at the same time reading from the newly-arrived sheet:

*"Jacob Strong, of St. Johnsbury, will sell ten shares of Cross-State Railroad stock at fifty."*

"The morning mail leaves in twenty minutes. Mr. Seacomb," interposed the superintendent.

"Yes; and there comes Mr. Shandy back again to examine the books," said Tom. "And see! he has the morning paper in his hand. I'll venture it he has found out his mistake, or suspects it, and wants more stock."

"Miss Kearsarge," said the superintendent to the fair driver, "go round the block slowly and drive up to the door again. We shall see what we shall see by that time."

Mr. Shandy now came sauntering into the office with assumed carelessness, and without offering to look at the books, accosted the three young gentlemen standing there.

"Good-morning once more, Seacomb. Good-morning, gentlemen. My name's Shandy. Presume you are employes of the road. I've made a little investment in it myself. Any of you want to sell any small jags of stock you have?"

"This is Mr. Black, the superintendent," said Tom,

with perfect politeness. "And this Mr. Saxe, our book-keeper."

"Glad to make acquaintance, young men. Am trying to gather up matters a little here. Going down to Boston to-night, if possible. How is it now? Want to sell anything? Will give fifty-five."

Neither of them had any stock to sell, the reader may be sure, though both young fellows actually had small interests, the savings of hard-earned wages, yet all loved Tom. The young men stood faithfully by each other. It was a severe temptation to poor Saxe, who could thus have made a clean thousand dollars. But there are some things better than money in this world. To be true to a friend, and have the consciousness of such fidelity in your heart, is one of them. Besides, Tom Seacomb was uniformly kind to others. He had gotten these men their places; he realized the old aphorism: "He who would have friends must show himself friendly." Now he was gathering the profit of a kind life, full of unselfish, friendly deeds. In fact, there was scarcely an employe on the whole road, from workshops to section-hands, who did not idolize the bright young cashier and secretary, who had really built the road by his energy before he was one-and-twenty. No; not a share would they sell while Tom's interests were at stake.

Shandy had entered an ice-house. He mentally resolved to "clean this whole uncivil brood of boys out in a day or two." But audibly he only remarked with civility:

"I see that there is a handful advertised for sale here in the morning paper. I guess I'll buy it. You have a telegraph here in the office, I suppose? Ask the operator to say to Jacob Strong that Charles Shandy will take

his shares at two per cent. advance on the market. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the operator, seating himself at the instrument. But the operator also was one of Tom's friends. He continued: "Mr. Shandy, we run the trains by telegraph. I must first work off the ten o'clock mail train. Time in five minutes."

Just then Miss Sadie's phaeton returned to the door. Tom and Mr. Black stepped out to her.

Mr. Black began:

"Tom, take my engine and run on ahead of the mail. We'll block the telegram as long as we possibly can. Go up and see Jacob Strong in person."

"Done!" exclaimed Tom. "Give me my pet engine, Breeze. Sadie, you can raise the money to-morrow. Go with me to-day. Send John back to the hotel with the horses and a word to your father that you will be in to dine. We can do it. One hundred miles the round trip in two hours, and fifteen minutes to talk business."

In an instant the word was flashed to the station to detain the mail train five minutes. Another flash, and the locomotive, Breeze, could be seen backing out of the round-house, she having been fortunately fired-up, for Tom often had occasion to use her, and she was usually kept ready for officers or some other extra duty. The phaeton rolled back along the streets toward the hotel. Its adventurous occupant, gathering her skirts about her graceful form, was picking her way across a gridiron of yard tracks toward the steaming engine, laughing gayly at the idea of accompanying her lover on his exciting journey. As all this was in full view of the office windows, within which sat the little man with sharp gray eyes, the machine was directed to move up the road

out of view. Passing by the machine-shops, Tom and Sadie soon climbed into the cab. A clean tarpaulin was thrown over the fireman's seat. Sadie was helped up to this perch. Tom stood shaking hands with Pete Larkin, the engineer, and a favorite driver he was.

"A fine morning, Mr. Seacomb," said Pete respectfully. "Where are we going this morning?"

"Well, Pete, we are to race with the telegraph to-day."

"How's that?"

"Must be at St. Johnsbury at eleven o'clock. Can we do it?"

"That's fifty miles in fifty-five minutes, Mr. Seacomb. Can the lady stand it? If so, here goes."

And the throttle being pulled, the noble machine, like a panting thing of life, begun to stretch herself along the line of her splendid task.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AN ENGINE'S FLIGHT.



IN THE office the impatient Shandy sat rapping his boot with a walking-stick, watching the telegraph operator. Had he got that message off yet? No, he had not. There was an extra just sent out which must be managed first. What extra? The operator never inquired about the nature of the trains. Had he sent it now? Not quite yet; the mail train was now to be managed. How long would that occupy him? Perhaps half an hour, as there were two down freights. Perhaps Mr. Shandy would do better to walk over to the Western Union office, for this was a purely private railroad wire. Yes, but he would have them understand that he intended to own this road, wires and all. To be sure, but the gentleman would not take the risk of a collision. Oh, no; not that. He would walk over to the Western Union rather.

But before he had gone far a messenger recalled him, saying that now he could use the line if he would return and state his exact message. And so, by one dilatory move after another, nearly a half-hour was saved, to Tom's advantage. But sooner or later the offer got off to buy Jacob Strong's stock, fifty miles away.

As the operator sat at his desk one of the clerks leaned over his shoulder to whisper:

"Why didn't you hint to the operator up there to bungle with the delivery?"

"Because," was the prompt reply, "you don't know



Tom Seacomb if you think he would thank anybody to lie for him by telegraph. I told this man I had sent his message. He doesn't read ticks, but trusts me. He may. I have sent it. That's Seacomb's style every time."

Thus the party in the central offices, Mr. Shandy busy looking over accounts, stirring up the clerks with ten thousand nervous questions, himself ill-at-ease, as was his uniform demeanor. He was continually asking for a reply to his dispatch, which came not yet.

In the cab of the locomotive! There sat the blue-eyed girl upon the high bench of the iron courser, one arm leaning through the open window, the fierce breeze unwinding her white wrap from her shoulder, and every now and then flirting it out like a banner, at which Tom would laugh and call it a harbinger of good, struggling to regain it, however, and wrap her snugly. But the young man's mind was too occupied with weighty thoughts to be in his usual gleeful mood, though he could not help thinking again and again that the glorious eyes never looked so fascinating as in that eager, flashing gaze, the face all aglow with splendid excitement, the merry voice striving at intervals to make itself heard in some question. Of course Tom had to bend his ear down close to her face to hear. The fireman wished she would ask him some question, and because she once deigned to, dreamed for a week of a row of small white teeth and red, shapely lips.

Pete Larkin sat at his post. He would have offered Tom his seat, but that the run was to be so fast that, as he explained, "a fellow had better be where he could pull handles lively if necessary."

The faithful man after that never broke the silence.

With one hand on the throttle-valve, with one arm resting on the lever of the air-brake, his face set hard and momentarily growing harder, so that after a while even a savage look settled down upon the strong, blackened features; thus sat Pete Larkin battling with those fifty miles and time. You felt as if he was angry at the distance and meant to annihilate it. Indeed, they seemed to be doing just that.

"There are two down freights, are there not, Pete?" inquired Tom as he leaned over the engineer's side of the reeling, bounding car.

A nod of the head was the only reply. Then again the silence, the rush of trees, rocks, bridges, and farmers' houses, like a great mottled stream, made up of something else besides water, but otherwise resembling a "wide, wide river on both sides," to quote Miss Sadie's words.

The speed was becoming terrible. Tom realized it. The young lady, in her supreme confidence in Tom, never thought of it. In fact, in the novelty of the excitement, the girl had fairly forgotten their pressing errand, and how much it boded of good or ill to them.

"I say, Pete," shouted Seacomb, "you expect to pass the first freight at the next station?"

A nod of the short-cropped head.

"You trust the telegraph to have put them on a siding?"

A nod of the head twice, and "Trust, fully."

"Oh, Tom! An engine facing us!" screamed Miss Sadie, half-springing from her seat, as rounding a sharp curve a long stretch of road flashed into view.

"Backing on!" laconically roared Pete, never turning his head.

So it proved. It was freight number one getting out of the way at a little station.

In an instant more they dashed by, the boys in the cab shouting with uplifted hands of cheer.

Then away, like the wild birds that started up from long grass and shrubbery at their approach.

"See, Tom," said Sadie, her white hand pointing to some lazy crows, whose flapping black wings could not keep pace with them, "we outfly the very birds! Oh, was there ever such a ride!"

The branches of overhanging trees bowed and rustled a Godspeed, the wild vines and bushes swung and hissed in the agitated air. An occasional farmer at the crossing stood aghast and stared at them, his sober nag plunging about with animal terror, at which they all laughed save Pete Larkin, who knew that their experiment was no laughing matter.

Pete raised his hand. Tom followed its pointing with a quick eye. It was freight number two, also safely out of their way at the little road-side water-tank.

"And now but ten miles straight work," spoke Pete. "We must run those ten miles in ten minutes."

The great machine now fairly leaped. It seemed almost as if you could feel the drive-wheels spring off the rail at each plunge of the piston-rods. The machinery worked without a jar, but the roar of the bounding wheels, echoing and re-echoing through the mountain gorges, was like hoarse thunder.

It was impossible to stand. Tom crouched at the young girl's feet, the fireman staggered at his task as he cast great blocks of fresh fuel into the yawning furnace door. The strain upon the nerves was fast becoming

unbearable, when Pete, with a plunge of relief, sent the throttle-valve home, shutting off steam. The white church-spire of St. Johnsbury rose peacefully against the green mountains, clustering hamlets cropping out from the maples, and lilacs just in their fresh blossoms; then the station platform, the faces of a few loungers about the depot, and the bustling village street. The Breeze came to a stand-still.

"On time to a minute, Mr. Seacomb," said Pete, with a gratified smile. "I'll turn her round and be ready to go back in fifteen minutes?"

"Yes," replied Tom, assisting Miss Kearsarge to alight. "We will be ready in that time. Sadie, will you wait in the ladies' room while I go across to the Union store, where I suppose Mr. Saxe has telegraphed Jacob Strong to meet me?"

In a moment more Seacomb stood in the presence of Jacob Strong, a tall, ungainly farmer, with pantaloons thrust into the tops of cowhide boots, a blue flannel frock extending well down to the knees, save where the left hand caught it up by being plunged into the pocket. An ox-whip stuck out from this hand. The right hand held a plug of chewing tobacco, from which Jacob had just taken a bite.

Slapping the plug down upon the store counter, Strong put out his great, rough hand with:

"How are you, Seacomb?"

"Very well, Mr. Strong. I am in a little haste to-day."

"Yis, yer allus was hurryin' up. Young feller, you'll never live eout half yer days neow, ef yer don't hold up and gee and haw a leetle more moderate-like."

"Thank you, Mr. Strong, for your solicitude in my

behalf; but really I must come right to business this time," said Tom, drawing Strong into the little counting-room of the country store. "Friend Strong, I want to buy that stock of this railroad that you advertise this morning for sale."

"Why, my dear boy, it's sold."

"Sold!"

"Yis; jest sold. A feller from Boston telegraphed for it. Wall, I got another dispatch from your super, as you was a-comin' up ter see me. But atwixt the tew I kinder got mixed up, and s'posed it was all the same, and sold it to a feller by name o' Shandy fer fifty-five. What's the matter, ole boy? Yer seem sort o' chap-fallen. Anything wrong, I swow I like yer. If I'd known—— Why, yer used ter tell us ter trust in God and keep our powder dry. Can't you do that?"

"Ah! Jacob, you honest old heart, you little know what your blunder will cost me," said Tom, about to turn wearily away. Then in a few brief words he explained the situation.

Jacob Strong's good heart was touched. The simple farmer, like everybody else, had learned to look upon Tom as a prodigy—a wonderful "Varmount boy, as 'ud teach them city chaps a lesson," and for whom he prophesied great things. And now was his Tom to be ruined, driven out of the country, indeed? The old farmer's eyes actually grew moist as he chewed the end of his whip for a moment, the two walking back toward the depot.

"Tom, my boy, I swow, I've got it! Them certificates hain't been delivered to that air Shandy yet. They are up to the farm. I've only sent him a dispatch that he can have 'em. Shove your engine into the yard and go

up to the farm. Put them stock into yer own pocket. Telegrams get mixed. D'ye see?"

"Ah, Jacob, I would rather go to Brazil than do that. A bargain is a bargain. You have said it. What sort of a future could a young business man expect who used a lie as his stepping-stone to power? I should never get over it."

"But who would know it?" said Strong.

"I should know it," firmly replied Tom. "God, the best friend I have, would know it. You, too, Jacob, would know it. There is no such thing as a secret in this universe, especially an evil secret."

"Right, my boy. God Almighty will look arter sech a feller as yer are," responded Jacob Strong, as he wrung Tom's honest hand good-by, beside the engine ready to return.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A GRAVE TEMPTATION.



IN THE cab of the Breeze stood three young people and the middle-aged engineer, eager to learn the result of the morning's exertion. The plain, sooty-handed fireman's interest is here mentioned as an evidence of the loyalty for Seacomb which pervaded all ranks of employes. Pete Larkin had explained the case more fully to the fellow in the interval of waiting. And besides, he was a youth of intelligence, a farmer's son, who after leaving the academy had determined on being a locomotive engineer, and was beginning by the rule with "firing."

Tom helped his companion again on the fireman's box. The three men formed a half-circle about her and listened to a hasty though lucid narrative of the failure.

"But what was the kind old dunce arguing with you about, and you as solemn as a preacher, shaking your head?" asked Sadie, tears of vexation almost springing from her eyes.

Then Tom related his resistance to a great temptation with which the obtuse conscience of Strong had offered to assist him.

"You dear, true heart!" exclaimed she, seizing his hands in both hers and fondling it. "You were not ashamed to tell us that, I hope?"

"No," answered Tom. "But I don't like to preach

self. You like me better because you found that out yourself."

"That's a kind of preaching which goes a good ways with all the boys of this road, Mr. Seacomb," put in Pete Larkin. "We never found you to be less than your word, but often a good deal more and better than your word. But we've lost fifteen minutes more. Shall we hurry back, or take it slow?"

There being now no special reason to hasten, the game having been lost, it was proposed by Tom to arrange for a leisurely return, the dispatcher being informed at each station on the route of their intended speed.

"Besides," added Tom sadly, "when a poor fellow has to say good-by, as I must to this road and dear old Breeze, he don't want to be hurried."

They rolled out of the little station, the warm rays of the midday sun flashing upon the paint and brass of the handsome mechanism, the pride of all the boys on the road. A strange figure was that above the head-light—a horse's head, with flowing mane, dilated nostrils, and small ears pricked sharply front. Those who knew Tom's earlier history recognized a favorite horse, which had more than once saved the boy's life and fortunes, in this life-like bronze. It had been done by one of the workmen in the foundry, out of gratitude to Tom for saving him from drunken habits to industry, when everybody else had abandoned him.

In the course of six or seven years there were not a few such cases—men and lads whom Tom Seacomb had befriended, and for whom he had secured employment, in a God-like effort to help as many others of his fellow-beings up with himself as he could—a kind of effort



which was his religion—to do good, to make the world better by living in it.

Tom preached, not from a pulpit, but from a railroad. He tried daily to live just such a life as he supposed the carpenter's son of Galilee would have lived if He had been cashier and one of the managers of a railroad. It was this young woman at his side who had first taught him these lessons. It is the truth of the New Testament also.

"Shall you go to Brazil, Tom?" asked Sadie, now that they could converse apart.

"I am out of a place here, of course. I may have to go; but never in Charles Shandy's employ," he replied.

"What do you mean?"

"That I may go down there to do, on my own errand, just what he wanted me to do for him," said Tom. "But let's dismiss it all now. I am too much excited to think coolly. Let's enjoy the ride back—my last ride on Breeze. Pete!"

"Well, sir."

"Stop down there by that next cut. There are some rare wild flowers growing among those rocks, if I remember aright, which I would like to pluck—for the young lady a memento."

And so they went leisurely on, pausing now and then to get a drink from some favorite spring which Tom knew, to converse with some farmer, busy with his plow alongside, or to enjoy some fine bit of scenery which opened on the view.

The time was all their own. At each station they had but to arrange time for the next, and a tireless steed was under them, willing to go at a walking pace or to fly like the wind.

A joyous afternoon had it been, but that it was to be the last. Yet Tom's great, generous nature, full of hope and trust, with a strong will which never deserted him in the hour of need, cheered all the rest in spite of themselves.

Of course they had to meet and pass many trains. Tom noticed that Pete Larkin embraced every opportunity to communicate the fact's of Tom's misfortunes—of course in a fragmentary manner—to the train-hands. At one place a gang of several hundred laborers was at work upon some improvements. Larkin threw the spark in among them. At the stations, also, yard-men, section-hands, etc., were made aware that some one had done, or was about to do, Tom Seacomb a great wrong.

Tom was first made conscious of this great sympathy by the looks of the men, by little cheers intended to convey a warmer than the usual feeling for him. Busy with his own thoughts and the society of the young lady, he had not paid very close attention to Pete, as they had gone over the line homeward bound. But as they neared the city of Montpelier these tokens of mingled popular sympathy and indignation became more and more marked. Then, too, an American machinist is no machine. He reads the papers, listens for himself to about all that is going on about him, and not unfrequently knows his employer's business quite intimately. Rumors had flown swiftly about during the day in the Montpelier streets and workshops.

As Tom's engine thundered into the depot-yard he saw a crowd of several hundred workmen, with their friends, congregated about the doors of the repair-shops. It was the hour for quitting work. A notice posted

conspicuously seemed the center of interest. Asking Miss Sadie to await him at the ladies' parlor of the station, Tom drew near to read:

"NOTICE:—The hours of work hereafter to be exacted of all help on this road shall be twelve hours for a day. No passes will be given. Wages will be reduced ten per cent.

"Per order NEW MANAGEMENT."

A swift thought came to Tom's mind as he beheld the flashing faces and angry gestures of the surging crowd.

Not that Tom Seacomb for a moment encouraged the thought; not that there was anything in his moral nature to give birth to such desperate expedients, perhaps, had not the men themselves caught sight of him and broken into a prolonged cheer. They crowded around him, those nearest plying him with questions swift and eager. They called for a speech, and some one rolling a hand-car toward him just then, a hundred brawny arms pushed and lifted him upon it.

"Seacomb!" "Speech!" resounded from the voices on every side.

Tom knew his own popularity with these rough, kind-hearted men. He knew how easily moved to desperate actions they were, especially where their own interests were involved. He had never believed in trade-unions, though fully aware of the existence of such organizations among the operatives of the road. As an official he had not opposed them, though thoroughly convinced that their tendency to strikes was not the true remedy for labor difficulties. Poor-born himself, however, his boyish heart was in full sympathy at the first in any

agitation with the working man as less likely to be offender than victim.

But Tom was now one of the employer class. He was a young capitalist, an influential citizen, and a well-known man, though young, who had been hoping to take his place in society, and wed the charming woman yonder in the station, daughter to a very wealthy man, whose summer home, at least, was in this common-wealth.

Let him be careful what he does. It is easy to light a fire. But who shall extinguish it?

All these thoughts, and more of like tenor, run through Tom's mind like lightning, between crossing the yard and mounting the improvised pulpit.

On the other hand, the savage instinct of revenge, which is natural to every man, and which, controlled, makes the true, good man, rose up within him. He was a young man wronged, legally wronged, because laws of men are not always right by any means. Something hissed, hot-breathed, from within:

"I could mob him at his hotel, and yet seem by my words to advise the men to be quiet while inflaming them. I could cause a mischief that would bankrupt his road. I could make an outlaw of myself, throw my life away at three-and-twenty and turn vagabond—all for a half-hour's sweet revenge. No; God has been too good to me. She is waiting yonder. I'll beat Shandy, but not with a club. It shall be brains against brains, character against character, pluck and endurance. These are the weapons that intelligent men use. There are courts and laws for me as for Shandy. Time also is mine, for he is fifty-five—more than two-thirds the way to eternal silence. While I—three-and-twenty."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FACING A MOB.



OM DECIDED quickly. It was a characteristic of the boy, Tom the Ready, and of the man, Seacomb.

Upon his stretching out his hand for silence, the angry, swaying mass grew hushed for a moment.

"Fellow-workmen:—All honest men have one common cause in this world——"

"You are right, young 'un!" shouted a gray old forgerman standing near.

"But honest men," Tom resumed, "do not always all see alike at first. They all want the right to prevail, but by what means, or just what is right, they are not always agreed——"

"We are all agreed, are we not, men?" shouted the same old voice again.

A hoarse cheer from many throats was the reply.

"Listen to me!"

"No, no! Lead us! Lead us! No more speech!" now began to be murmured, as the quick instincts of the men detected Tom's pacific intent.

The uproar became every moment greater. It was evident that the leaders were resolved on desperate steps and intended to press Tom in as a figure-head for respectability. The glint of lanterns now appeared here and there as the night fell. A large bonfire was soon

ablaze, from which a red glare lighted all the neighboring buildings with lurid and angry aspect.

"To the office!" "To the hotel!" "Curse him! If he will not lead us, tip him out!" "No! we'll fight for him!" These were the sounds that now in wild contradiction saluted Tom still upon the hand-car.

When Tom was a school-boy he had paid considerable attention to the art of public speaking. But the boy had never had such an audience as this before. Indeed, it might well task the utmost skill of the most consummate orator to face, to gain a quiet hearing at any length from, and master this enraged mass.

Tom knew that to keep cool himself was the first requisite in the mastery of others. So he quietly removed his hat and sat down upon a nail-keg that chanced to be on the car. The uproar, however, increased. Then he began talking in a conversational tone with the men nearest him. He frankly told the story of the legal revolution which had taken place in the road.

As he talked on his hearers themselves began to claim silence of those nearest them, that they themselves might hear. Others pressed into the listening group. Within ten minutes perfect and respectful silence reigned in response to the gray-haired forgerman, who shouted:

"I hope we shall all hear the interestin' story the young 'un is tellin'. What say?"

"Ay! ay!" sprung from a hundred bawling mouths, and calloused hands waved upward in token of their desire to see Tom's face.

Then the boy stepped up on his nail-keg. He called on all his skill and wit. He told them in lucid sen-

tences the story of the road from his express-wagon to the present time. As he finished his narrative, he said:

"Now, men, I once had my dream. I wanted to grow old right here. I am a Yankee-born. They say young men should go West. Why so? If they like the West, all right. But I like New England. It is my home. It is a fair heritage, a beautiful land. I love these old hills. I see the German and the Irishman coming here and thriving, right in crowded old New England. That is all right. But if they can cross seas and grow rich on these hills, I, a native-born, may be excused if I try with good hope to do the same. The West will fill up with strangers to whom one part of the country is as strange as another. I meant to stay! (Applause.) I meant to build up these villages, encourage manufacture, mining, farming, schools, churches. (Applause.) Of course I had some selfish purposes, if you call them such. My old father and mother have a home in your capital city. My sister is sheltered under the same roof—and I own the roof. (Applause.) I wanted—well I may say it—a little woman to come to my house and eat my bread. (A voice, "Good for you, Tom; that's all right!" and "Ay! ay!")

"But the dream is over. I am outwitted—for the present. A very great power of monopoly, which I'll fight when I'm Governor (cheers and prolonged applause, with a voice, "We'll run you for Governor this fall!")

"Thank you, not just yet, boys. But, as I was saying, a big monopoly swallows me as a hawk would a chicken. What am I going to do? Make a fool of myself and fight with my fists till they handcuff me? (A voice, "We are with you!") No, no; I submit to law

and good order, and bide my time. I fight brains with brains, such as I have. Wait and see. (Feeble applause.)

“And one word more. What are you going to do? Break the public peace in riot and fetch up in prison? I believe not. You will peacefully go elsewhere, if you think best, and find a better market for your honest toil, or abiding here, as I advise, await the turn of events, like decent citizens. Now, let us go home.”

“That’s good enough for a preacher, an an’ old ’un at that!” said the old forgerman.

In a moment more the better sentiment would have permeated the entire mass. There were signs of breaking up. The neighboring steeple clock struck out the hour of eleven. Tom was about to press his way to the depot, wondering whether or not he should find Miss Sadie in charge of her anxious father and awaiting him, when a messenger elbowed his way up to the hand-car and passed Tom a note. In the light of a torch he read it standing there.

“To TOM SEACOMB: You oily-tongued young scoundrel, you *know* better than to incite riots. And you know your liability. Accept this favor from one whom I suppose you cordially hate, and flee the country before my father can secure your arrest. Yours,

“CHAS. K. SHANDY.

Tom read the missive in silent astonishment, but instantly and involuntarily broke out with:

“The cool little villain! Why, I had almost dispersed the riot for him! I wonder if he has been in town all the while.”

Just then Mr. Black, the superintendent, who had



succeeded in gaining Tom's side, reached up inquiringly for the note. Tom handed it to him with the question:

"What does it mean?"

"Mean?" indignantly exclaimed Black. "It means that the cool, righteous villains, father and son, have you in a trap. They'll charge and prove you as seen haranguing striking workmen on their road; they'll point out your motive to be revenge for defeat and discharge. And the venal courts, who worship monopoly's money, will believe them."

"And you'll swear that I was persuading the men to go home?" said Tom.

"Alas, poor fellow! I couldn't get near enough to hear you. No, you have no witnesses but the rioters themselves. That noble little scamp, my son Charley, has you in a devil's grip."

As the two young men stood consulting more or less, their conversation fell on other and excited ears.

Swiftly the rumor grew that some violence was threatened to "our Tom," or that the new management had appealed to the governor for the militia, who would soon be upon them, or that the "bosses" of the shops were summoned to deliver themselves up. Indeed, all the wild and confused stories with which mobs are usually enraged began to circulate and inflame anew the gangs.

"We'll die for you, Seacomb!" yelled a handful of thoughtless youths near Tom.

In a moment the cry was taken up.

"Seacomb! Seacomb forever! They are going to arrest him! To the round-house!"

"My dear fellows," excitedly cried Tom, "you do me more harm than good. I'm in no danger. Go quietly

home, if you love me. I adjure any man here, whom I have befriended, to do me a good turn now by going straight home and to bed."

But it was only those nearest him who could even distinguish the poor boy's voice. In mad uproar, like an enraged beast whose whelp was threatened, the swaying, tumbling press, shouting a thousand commands to itself, saw only the impassioned gestures which Tom made, and grew the more frenzied as it misinterpreted them for appeals to resistance.

Headlong rolled the hand-car toward the round-house, a huge brick building wherein locomotives were kept when not in use. It was some hundred yards away.

Vagabonds from the city streets had now joined the railroad men, and sympathizing citizens and employes from the Central Vermont road.

Some scamp threw a torch into a pile of wool in the freight-house. A hundred torches were soon as nothing in the garish splendor of the greater conflagration.

Behold Tom Seacomb, seated upon a hand-car as upon a triumphal chariot, powerless in the hands of his mistaken friends, rolling along at the head of a mob bent on barricading itself. Along the broadly lighted yard, crossing one of the main streets of the city, in full view of multitudes of startled citizens drawn out in fear, gentlemen who had known and respected him as a youthful prodigy of manly virtues; passing the windows of the depot, where, pale with terror, the beautiful face of his beloved gleamed out upon him, her stern father at her side. So rode Tom, in the short-lived and terrible glory of a man for whom a thousand outlaws were willing to die, man by man.

And it was all a horrible mistake!

"I say, Black," begun Seacomb to his friend who had clung to the car with him, "this disgrace is worse than death. It is death socially. Known and seen as a mob leader! Where is this going to end?"

"In front of a file of soldiers marching to prison, I fear," replied Black, thoroughly disheartened and at his wits' end.

"Look! there come—no, it is the fire engines for the freight depot."

"Yes, but look yonder! In we go through the great doors. Tom, leap into one of those engines, and let us dash out and away!"

"Impossible, Black; there's not one with steam up."

"I'll creep into your 'Breeze,' and turn on the blower," eagerly responded Black, as the hand-car rumbled through the great doors, which closed behind them.

"I say no." And Tom seized Black's arm. "We could get no headway in a hundred feet, man! Besides, do you see? The mob is tearing up the rails! Heavens! The madmen mean to burn their own fortress if they can't hold it, and destroy a dozen or so of the company's engines. I see it now."

"And you and I ringleaders!" groaned Black, as he sunk back onto the bottom of the car.

The vast amphitheater where they were now shut in with three or four hundred rioters was at this moment a weird-looking place. The light from sputtering torches, lanterns, and windows illumined from without; the tall forms of some ten or twelve motionless locomotives, from whose stacks high up in the roof smoke was gently passing away like the breathing of grim giants about to sleep, and from whose wheels here and there little jets of expiring steam were shooting down and along the

floor; the deep pits between the rails hissing with dumped ashes, into which an unguarded step might and did, ever and anon, plunge some swearing fellow; the solemn facing of these somber machines all toward the center, as if they were conspiring for a focalized plunge forward upon the throng there gathered; and soon the concentrated blaze of several head-lights as one mischief-maker after another caught at the idea and applied match to wick in those convex and powerful reflectors. These were the stage-settings; the actors the reader can imagine, as they foamed, and frothed, and piled defenses against the doors or sought each to harangue the multitude at the same moment.

There seemed to be agreement in but one decision as yet—that no man should leave the building. What befell one should befall all.

For a few moments Tom sat, apparently forgotten by the rabble in their zeal to make all secure. Looking through a small window he could see the citizens without trundling forward two brass guns, whose usual duty of late had been purely ornamental about the base of the soldiers' memorial on one of the city squares. But Tom knew that the guns had seen service. He knew, too, the sober indignation of law-abiding citizens of a New England community, and that those guns had without doubt been shotted. The very citizens now handling them had probably handled them, or others like them, on more glorious fields. Tom Seacomb's sympathy was all with them now, also. Mobs must be put down.

In one bound Tom sprung to the main door, his resolution formed. Shouting to a brawny mechanic who stood holding the latch, he cried:

“Madman! Open that door! Are you fools all? Clear

away! This horse-play has gone too far. I am no rioter. Open, I say."

The man, turning around and glaring with surprise, managed to shout out:

"Here, fellows, this way! Seacomb's gone back on us!"

There was an instantaneous surge forward about the door.

"I say, men, that this thing must stop! I'll go out and meet arrest like a man; alone, if need be; but I'll sail no longer under false colors. I'm not your leader; I scorn your rebellion against the public peace. You are good-hearted, blind outlaws. Open that door; for go out I will, or you shall trample me to death!"

The young man took hold of the arm of the giant by the door. The giant struck at him. Quick as lightning, strong in the right, Seacomb, evading the blow, planted both his feet in the pit of the giant's stomach. It was the trick of a gymnast. It doubled up his adversary like a pocket-knife, and before the man could rise Tom threw the great lever thundering down and pulled wide open the two-leaved doors.

There is such power in moral courage on the one hand, and such weakness in being in the conscious wrong on the other. Tom triumphed by one; the round-house garrison was paralyzed by the other.

## CHAPTER XX.

### A BOY'S SELF-RESPECT.



THE FRONT of the building was one dense mass of human beings. Directly in the foreground stood a file of city police. Poor men, they were not much accustomed, in the simple round of their nominal duties in a rural city scarce more than a village, to such rude work. They shrunk back a step or two, as if expecting a sally. If the reader pleases to ask any one of those guardians of the place to this day, he will find how grateful the men were to Tom Seacomb, who really solved their bloodless problem for them.

Immediately Tom stepped into the open space and said :

‘Gentlemen, this is all a mistake. I cannot explain it to you now, but there is, I am sure, no disposition on the part of these hard-working men to fight. Come, take me before some magistrate, and let’s get to our homes and families.’

“A fine speech, young man,” said an officious functionary, who had been hiding behind a blue oil-barrel while there was any danger, but now promptly took Tom by the collar.

“You can trust me to follow you,” said Tom fiercely, shrinking with a sense of disgrace under the fellow’s fat and trembling arm.

The officer let go his hold. The crowd opened. The two cannon were now in plain view of the excited rabble

witnin the round-house, and at sight of them the men begun to drop off, stealing forth in little groups till the most of them were scurring up the embankments on either side, flying toward their humble cottages.

The great street crowd fell in behind as Tom and his escort moved away toward the police station. To his praise be it said, Mr. Black soon managed to join himself in voluntary surrender, or at least was a necessary witness and friend to Seacomb's side.

It was a sad ending of a beautiful day. The morning had broken like a hundred other mornings that had dawned on this hero's true yet much suffering life.

And yet what had he done wrong? The writer can see nothing. Can the reader? "Bad luck," the devil that is in things, the power of one rich young man who never earned his salt, had set agoing such evil as seemed to threaten his rival's ruin. Circumstances seemed to help the bad one. Was God sleeping?

For Tom had learned from the gentle lips of Sadie to trust in his God; that that great Savior who spoke of a sparrow's fall as being noted by our Heavenly Father, was his Savior, caring for all his needs both of body and soul if permitted. Permitted? Every hour since Shandy's appearance in the office had been to Tom an hour of prayer for help. And now this the apparent end.

These were Tom's thoughts along that night-en-shrouded street, seeking the bar of the common night-watch like any common drunkard.

He afterward recalled that at one point on the march the white dome of the new State House looked calmly down upon him from among the stars. Tom thought of his boyish dream to be one day inaugurated governor

on those marble steps. And how far away it all seemed that sad hour. To prison rather.

"Let me think. Did not Shandy the sinner speak piously of the Almighty? Did he not say that his son Charley was a pious boy, who never caused him a moment of anxiety? But I have borne my father upon my back, as it were—have rescued and sheltered him for ten years. Piety? One must live long and solve many problems to discover its true meaning from merely human examples. But then I know no other way for me than to do right, and again do right, suffering or rejoicing."

Thus meditated Tom as he walked.

They had now arrived at the police-station. With respectful sympathy the thronging people seemed to realize Tom's unfortunate position, and treated his fallen condition with unexpected consideration. There was no exultation, no hurras, but remarkable quiet.

The city judge, being in his place, had called about him several leading citizens. Their heads were together as Tom entered.

At once the magistrate arose, and approaching said:

"This is very unfortunate, Mr. Seacomb. Suppose you step this way," therewith leading off toward a private office.

As soon as they were entered, the prominent citizens aforementioned accompanying, the judge said kindly:

"Be seated, Mr. Seacomb and gentlemen. I regard this as a most unfortunate business. Come in!"

It was in response to a knock which proved to be by Mr. Black.

"I think we should release Seacomb. His punishment will be a social disesteem heavy enough to bear.



A proud young man grievously fallen! You have enjoyed, young sir, great prosperity in this community. But in an evil hour you attempted force, illegal force——”

“Allow me, judge,” eagerly put in Black, “I can testify——”

“Black, we are not going to have any trial. I have seen the Shandys, and they do not wish to appear against him. Seacomb, you can go home. What say you, gents?”

There seemed to be universal though silent assent.

With that the judge opened a private door into the street.

“Gentlemen,” said Tom with great firmness, his handsome face as white as marble, the thin, shapely lips almost bloodless, as he started to his feet before them, “I do not propose to sneak off with your sufferance. I have done no wrong. I am financially ruined. I must go elsewhere to begin again at the foot of the hill, and I’m not afraid to. The time will come when you will all treat me with the old consideration. But that’s neither here nor there. If you suppose I am going to leave a tarnished name behind me, you are mistaken.”

The manly speech was astounding. The fat judge rubbed his chin and knew not what to say. The magistrate’s confused demeanor confirmed Tom’s suspicions that the same monopoly which could purchase lawyer, courts, and legislatures, had “tipped” this minor judge to work the bright young fellow out of the way as quietly as possible. Of course a great monopoly does not want to make too much fuss over a small matter; it must cause offences enough at best, and its policy is a “still hunt” wherever that is possible.

At length the judge managed to inquire:

“What would you have us do, Seacomb?”

“I would have you convene your court at the usual hour to-morrow morning,” replied the ready young man.

“I shall appear thus, in open day, before all Montpelier and the world. You will then, sir, be obliged to publicly discharge me with honor, or go on with your trial. And, mark me, I am but a mere boy; but if you fail to make out a case against me, I’ll start a suit for damages, and hunt out the scoundrels who have not been content with my business ruin but are athirst for my blood. There’s law in the land for a poor boy like me.”

“But—but—we do not want a trial.”

“No; yet I do. I know the men. I have the proofs. Have the kindness, for instance, to read that note.”

And Tom handed the judge “my son Charley’s” penciled scrawl.

As one after another read it, indignation begun unmistakably to appear upon several of the honest citizens’ faces. A conspiracy to ruin a young man to please another young man.

The judge could not endure the pressure. Turning to Tom, he said:

“My dear fellow, it shall be as you say. You are released on your own recognizance. Come to the courtroom in the morning. But you are already exonerated in the presence of these foremost citizens. The press shall set you right to-morrow before the whole nation. Now, let us go home.”

“Yes,” replied Tom, “go home. You are easily out of it. The word home strikes heavily on my ears. I have nothing but my good name and God’s approval. But I guess that’s everything. Good-morning.”

Tom put on his hat, battered and soiled by the night, his neat garments also torn and muddy, and walked out into the street, under the morning stars. Several gentlemen offered to congratulate him, but politely thanking them, even rejecting kindly the arm of Mr. Black, the young fellow strode rapidly down the street toward the old mansion which he had purchased for his parents' and sister's home.

It was a grand old place, the residence of a former wealthy citizen of the town, which, because of the changes in the neighborhood by factories and new railroads, had ceased to be desirable for fashionable people, so that its purchase had come within Tom's reach.

"Good-by, old trees," said he, as he strolled under the great boxwoods and leaned against one of them. "The poor-house lad has come to say good-by. How happy I have been here. What dreams I have had. Good-by, and how shall I come back in fancy to haunt you when the moon is shining as now. If I were to sell this, why the seven or eight thousand dollars would put me all right again, and father and mother might lodge in a garret till I got rich again. No. Till they die, if I can, and I can, for I have no debts, I'll hold a home for them."

Then the boy went into the stable. His favorite mare, Breeze, whinnying a welcome of recognition, he led her out into the mingled moonlight and gray of the morning, and sat down on a bench admiring her shapely form, the animal moving about him with affectionate wonder. Then he talked to her, told her that since she had more than once as good as saved his life and fortunes, she should never be sold.

"No, never, my old Breeze. The boy will go far and

work for you. I wish I could take you with me. I wonder if the dumb animals have souls. At any rate the Good Book says that the merciful man is merciful to his beast."

More talk there was between these good friends, which some readers would laugh at if here set down, but some would understand. A man who can make fast friends with a horse has a good spot in his heart. Be sure of that, reader. Animal instinct is sharp to detect selfishness and cruelty.

Finally, embracing the mare about the neck with both arms, the dumb creature dropping her head over the man's shoulder, they stood for a moment embraced, and then Tom led her back to her stable without a word, and entered the house. At the door he afterward remembered that he paused to say aloud:

"I will ride her the day I am inaugurated governor. Now see."

In his room Tom kneeled down to pray. He had no desire for sleep. The morning was fast breaking in the east. That prayer of a young heart deeply tried we will not attempt to follow. It told God everything. It asked for strength to do right; to suffer with cheerfulness; for help to succeed. The tears that filled the young man's eyes were tears of peace, as he arose and opened his Bible to read Psalm XCI. He also read those passages in Matthew which tell of the lilies and the birds; read till a great manly strength had come upon him and an indescribable peace. If God be for us, who can be against us?

Then prone upon the bed as he was he slept. It is the relief of youth. Years hence sleep will not come often, however weary we are

When Tom awoke it was the broad light of an April morning. Birds were singing at the open windows; the soft notes of his sister's touch upon the piano sounded through the old house.

"Poor child! She is such a home-body that the world might come to an end and she not know it. I'm glad. This is my last day. Now to court and an interview with Shandy—and then Sadie, and I'm off."

He rose and begun the day by committing his cause to God; then, having bathed away the stains of the previous eventful night, as he entered the breakfast-room neither the old parents nor his blooming sister detected a sign of his great trouble.

"Good morning, all," was his cheerful salutation as they drew to the board. "I was detained quite late last night by business that promises in the end to take me to South America."

"South America!" was the echo in trio.

"Why, Tom, what can you mean? I thought at last you were a fixture at the office," incredulously exclaimed his sister Bessie.

"Well, Bessie, I'll explain to you more fully. We will not talk about it now," replied Tom, with perfect self-control.

"No, we won't talk about any South America for our Tom, now or any other time, will we, mother?" said the old father, with a half-vacant look, brushing a ready tear from his eye with the sleeve of his elegant dressing-gown. It was evident that the decrepitude of age had begun to make him but an aged child. Yet it was not the aging which years alone bring.

The mother, with a quick, keen look, full of maternal solicitude, seemed to ask questions with her fine old

eyes; but her lips moved not. A sad, an indescribable past had this poor woman had; but her faults and follies had been bitterly attoned; and now, in the presence of her loving children, a chastened peace and child-like submission had settled over that once storm-tossed soul.

The meal ended, Tom and his sister stood for a few moments alone under the old portico, where the boy briefly reviewed the events of the past thirty-six hours, and unfolded to her his plans.

"I start to-night for Boston. I shall see Charley Ketridge at his office, my dear, and will take him the love of his little wife, if you want me to call you so." The young girl blushed but made no reply. "Charley, dear old boy, will help me off. I shall go to Brazil, but not for Shandy. I shall outwit him. I'll have my own gang of surveyors, project my own telegraph and railroad lines, sell my information to the Emperor Dom Pedro or any capitalist who will buy, and found again my fortunes, returning in a year or so. See?" And in the brightness of his hopes the young fellow seemed for an instant to forget the ruin of many hard years that lay about him and the exciting perils which he was too wise to ignore before him.

"Meanwhile, sister dear, be as happy as you can with your good Charley Ketridge. He will come up often. If I'm gone too long, we'll arrange for you to marry. But for the present stay by the old folks. This house is mine, free of debt. I'll send money. Be patient. No human being ever lost anything in God's world, take it all in all, in sacrificing for father and mother."

"Oh, Tom! do not doubt me," cried Bessie, throwing her arms about his neck. Her utterance failed her. The brother unwound her fair arms, kissed her, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### IN EXILE.



OM SEACOMB walked straight to the town hall. He could but observe a difference in the chill greeting of the villagers upon the streets. Suspicion and misjudgment were abroad. He dared not look at the columns of the morning papers, though he purchased them all. He knew full well the methods of monopoly with the press. It would be strange, if it were necessary to his ruin, if the tremendous and unscrupulous power of money had not been exerted at the newspaper offices.

It was exactly the hour, as he observed, pulling out an elegant watch, a present from the employes of the road, as he entered the court-room.

One glance showed him that monopoly, balked of his public trial, had avenged itself by arranging that his public vindication should be barren of glory.

The room was empty. The honorable court had "planned certain repairs in the court-room—been planned for months; it seemed best to let the carpenters have it; in an hour it would be a confusion of hammers and saws." Court sat in a small ante-room.

"Oh, Seacomb, glad to see you!" said the jolly judge. "Mr. Clerk—a little formality only—read and enter a *nolli*."

The clerk, acting for the State, with great rapidity read off Tom's arrest the preceding night. The judge said:

"That is all, Mr. Seacomb. It's all right. You are honorably discharged. Mistaken arrest by officer. Good-morning, and allow the law to apologize for its zeal not according to knowledge."

"May it please your honor," said Tom, "in the presence of this company, a handful of loungers, I denounce this whole procedure as a mockery. But the end is not yet. There are years to come. I respect law, but not this court. Make the most of it, if you wish. Good-morning."

As Tom descended the stone steps of the city hall, he observed young Shandy passing across the main corridor from the office of a well-known lawyer, whose abilities were as well-known as his unscrupulousness. Tom made no sign of having seen him, but walked briskly up to the railroad office, where he soon entered to meet, as he supposed he should, the elder Shandy.

"Pleasant day, young man," said Shandy, though not deigning to extend the hand. "I congratulate you on the better showing of the real facts than appearances last night. But," continued he rapidly, giving Tom no time for reply, "we have concluded, my son and I, that we shall not want you in Brazil—nor anywhere else, in fact. Young man, go West and start again. Be patient, industrious and honest. Shun bad appearances, and I guess you'll get along. I guess so—guess so," and the cold eyes kept running over a pile of papers on the desk, never looking up. Then continuing: "Be honest and trust in God. That's my way. I begun poor, and——"

"Shandy, look into a man's face for once," Tom broke in.

Shandy looked up, and the gray eyes, wide-open with



astonishment at the boy's boldness to him, the great millionaire, actually got as high as the stud on Tom's shirt-front.

"I did not come here," continued Tom, "to ask you to be a preacher unto me. Preach to those who will hear you. Nor did I come to exchange insults or bandy bad words. We meet as two business men must, for brief business' sake. For a moment we are equals. You and your friends now control this road. I suppose you intend to pool it. At any rate, you will do as you please. My stock and the stock of my friends is at your mercy."

"Sell out to me, my boy, sell out."

"No, sir, never. I am going away. It will please you to know that. But as long as I have two hands to earn other bread I'll hold on to this stock. If the courts ever grow honest again, I'll hold you to account for your abuse of the road, if I can command the means to bring suit. It may be years away; it may be sooner than you think. I called to give my friend, Charles Kettridge, now of Boston, power to vote on my shares while I am absent."

"Very well, my boy. The book-keeper will enter it so." Which was done. "Now, drive slow, Seacomb. I sometimes hit hard, but I don't want to hurt a mere boy. Good-morning."

"One thing more—my pay; and I have certain valuables in the safe."

"Certainly, certainly," said Shandy, looking over his shoulder at the clerks. "Let this young man enter and take what belongs to him, giving a receipt. Make out his pay at once also. Understand?"

In a moment more Tom was gone. As the door closed

behind him, one of the foolish clerks, meaning Tom no harm, remarked to his neighbor:

"I believe Seacomb will try his fortunes in South America."

Mr. Shandy overheard it, dropped his work, sat absorbed in thought for some moments, when he turned suddenly and sent a telegram to Boston.

Tom strode thoughtfully down the familiar street. Should he say one more and fondest good-by? On every other point his clear mind was fully resolved since last night. But this problem of the affections was not so easy. She was good and wise and true? Yes, but she was of lofty spirit and a high sense of honor, and had she not seen him from the depot windows apparently heading a lawless mob? True, he could and should explain all that, and she would believe him. Yes, if her haughty old father, never overfavoring the match, would suffer them to meet. But to be obliged to steal an interview and appear yet again in a false position; to be again insulted, driven forth, stung—he could not bear it.

He stood now by the steps of her hotel. Many saw him and coldly recognized him. Should he go in? He could write and explain all his plans. The parting would be too hard. He paused irresolute.

"No, no," said Tom to himself, as he turned upon his heel. "I'll write her all. But to run the risk of meeting Mr. Kearsarge and being insulted by him—perhaps I'm a moral coward. Yet no again, I could not break away. My heart would fail me quite. It shall not be for long. Good-by."

Tom's baggage was at the station of the Central road. The train yet lacked two hours of her time. He

employed the interval in a few matter-of-fact calls upon old business friends, bearing himself with simple self-respect, much as if nothing had happened. But something had happened. He moved in a well-nigh universal atmosphere of suspended judgment, if not of actual distrust. And yet many of these very men had been only too glad to avail themselves of his kind offices in the days of his prosperity and influence. Tom was glad when the train bore him away; the beginning of a long road with many a turn.

Tom was not as yet much of a traveler, and it was with strange emotions that he awoke the next morning in the, to him, unknown city of Boston. An hour or two later, seated in Charley Kettridge's office, he was telling the story of recent disasters.

"Now, old friend," he concluded, "how much money can you spare me?"

"I can loan you five thousand dollars."

"But I do not need that, all at once; nor indeed a dollar," replied Tom, with a gratified smile and boyish, frank slap on the shoulder. "I have just that amount with me. I shall equip the expedition, pay the men partly in advance, pay passages, change the rest to gold, and then expect you to honor my drafts here to the extent—well, as far as you will. We'll share and share alike in the profits. Now, let's to business."

By night the surveying instruments, camp equipage, etc., had been purchased. The next day was spent in securing all the available maps, recent reliable publications, commercial reports, and statistical papers obtainable concerning Brazil, Ecuador, the United States of Colombia, and the various countries of northern, eastern and western regions of South America. Kettridge had the

acquaintance of consuls at the port of Boston, which greatly facilitated matters.

"These papers will occupy me all the voyage in hard study," said Tom. "For I do not intend to go into that country like a fool."

Five days later Seacomb stood, one morning, on the deck of the Brazilian steamer *San Antonio*. He was alone. It was early morning. The sun was just bursting over the sea. No land was in sight. He held in his arms two carrier pigeons. They were from a brood of pets which he had long cherished in his now far distant northern home. As he tied the tiny message under their wings, he held the tender creatures caressingly in his hands, stroking their fair and shapely necks.

"I say, Rolland, I can see," said Tom to the bird, "just how the old cat looks, up under the elms by the porch. I wish you and I were there now. Don't you?"

The bird sharply turned its head, looking up with an intelligent glance, and then lifted its wings, out-spreading them as if for flight.

"Well, now, old fellow," continued Tom, his homesick heart fairly choking his utterance. "I'm going to send you there. Home for you—but for me? God only knows what. Fly in and out of the old trees, perch on the window-sills and look the loved ones in the face for me. Pick crumbs from their hands. Soar over all the dear city, everywhere, everywhere! But of all things coo to the little maid whose letter you bear. Go!" and he flung the bird free in mid-ocean.

"And thou, too, Rolland's good mate. Go quickly after him. You, at least, shall not be sundered. Make haste, Kate, back to your brood."

The boy lifted the arching neck to his whiskered cheek and then cast her also to the winds.

Upward, swirling round and round in spiral ascent of the dizzy blue, rose the doves, one after the other. Tom stood gazing upward after them, still solitary upon the deck, save for the pacing officer, who from a distance regarded without venturing to interrupt his passenger. The cool of the morning rapidly changed into the sultry breath from southern seas. The clouds were yet spotted with the two tiny creatures mounting upward in vain search for some headland as a guide.

A cloud now intervened, and with a sigh Tom turned and looked down into the sea.

‘God speed them! I know not which is the most hazardous flight, theirs homeward or mine wayward. Heaven guide them! Maybe that, if Sadie ever comes as of old tripping down past the elms and maples to my door, my sister’s companion, swinging her hat by the string, maybe of a summer evening one of these winged messengers shall fly panting, and drop into the embrace of these two fond girls. It tells her of my old love.’

Tom dreamed all that day through of his pigeons in their airy voyage. So many doubts arose as to their arrival that he was glad he had taken the more prosaic methods of the United States mails before embarking. Glad, too, of Charley Kettridge’s friendly visit soon to old Vermont. Still it was a boy’s poetic fancy to send a message from the ocean.

“Fresh water, sir,” sung out the man at the lookout one morning, as he drew up his bucket.

“Here we are in the mouth of the Amazon, gentlemen,” said the captain to the party of passengers who clustered on the quarter-deck.

"But there is no land in sight," queried one of the eager group.

"No," replied the captain. "We are nearly a hundred miles from land. But this great river, in the spring months especially, stains the broad ocean yellow nearly six hundred miles from shore. All about us is fresh water, though we seem to be yet at sea. Observe the tufts of grass and herbage once in a while. A mighty river, surely."

Yet another day, and then the low-lying hills about the west; soon the low roofs of the city of Para, the cheese-box of a fort, the dirty wharves, the idle people, then the landing.

Tom was many miles from his native land, but only at his journey's real beginning.

The reader will easily picture the transfer of Tom's company, himself, one young surveyor, named Bourne, whom he had found a student in a Boston high-school, and two trusty men, Sam Clarke and Bill Krank, to the deck of the Amazon Steamship Company's little boat, the Titan. The start up the grand river was to be made in the early morning. It was the intention to increase the force of the party by hiring Indians, negroes, and half-breeds, as necessity dictated further on.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### IN THE ANDES.



R. BOURNE," said Tom, coming through the flap of the tent, as the day broke some three weeks after we last saw the party, "this is wild enough."

"Yes, sir," replied Bourne. "We are fairly in the heart of the wilderness."

"About twelve hundred miles from the ocean, as I make it," said Tom; "and no civilized man but us four within three hundred miles. I call Sam and Bill civilized gentlemen beside these dozen heathen we have hired. How was the night during your watch?"

"Calm and sultry, sir. Night-birds and snoring niggers and Indians; that's all."

"We must observe the strictest military discipline now, Mr. Bourne. We four must never all sleep at once; always a white-face on guard. Inspection of camp, arms and men promptly at four A. M. The mornings are our times for labor and marching, with the mercury at one hundred by eleven o'clock."

"Yes, sir. Bugle will sound in five minutes."

And so indeed it did. A curious company responded to its call. The straight, military figure of Tom Seacomb in front of the main tent, clothed in buckskin leggings, light-textured hunters'-cloth frock, broad Panama hat, armed at the belt. The other Americans in similar gear. Then the dozen natives, a motley crowd of half-savages, scantily clothed, but

strong and serviceable in appearance, and withal good-natured so long as well fed and not maddened with the forest fever.

"All well?" said Tom, as they stood up in line.

"Every man well, sir," answered Mr. Bourne, after the interpreter had so assured him.

This was as yet little more than at the forests' edge. Days shall come, and many of them, when few and fewer will be the voices that can give such answer, as chills and fever seize upon their victims.

"Present arms!"

The three Americans and two of the Indians at this handed Tom their rifles, the most improved American make and the property of the expedition. Each weapon, subjected to a sharp, close scrutiny, was handed back to its owner. Then, in turn, the knives of the rest of the company. In turn the ammunition boxes, stores, surveying implements, and all other utensils necessary to their perilous march beyond the reach of any hand but their own for self-preservation.

"The horses, Clarke, now."

The command was soon executed. Two really fine animals and two inferior, yet strong beasts were now led before the young commander.

Tom then stepped out to the luggage pile and ran a quick eye over the boats and other heavier portions of what might be called the train of the tiny army of invasion, and returned with a gratified smile to his tent door.

"Now to breakfast, Mr. Bourne."

The bugle, with Sam Clarke's lusty breath, again made the forest echo. The men retired to their shelters of green boughs. Sam and Bill sat down under the



extension of the captain's tent. Bourne and Seacomb, served by an obsequious negro in the main tent, fell to with a relish.

"Mr. Bourne," said Tom, as they ate, "we have accomplished a good beginning. I would not sell the information I have even now secured for twenty thousand dollars. We strike straight up the river gorge now for the top of the Andes."

"How far do you calculate, Mr. Seacomb, before we shall get above these low, hot forests?"

"I think our next camp will show a difference, my boy. You are not sick?"

"No. I had a slight chill last night; but the quinine you gave me is all swallowed, and I know I shall escape."

"Heavens, Bourne, don't get down! I tell you we four white men *must* keep alive and able-bodied. Think of being left alone!"

"I'll do all that a strong will and a temperate life will afford, Mr. Seacomb. Never drank a glass of liquor in my life, except for medicine."

"I know. That's one reason why I took you. It is my own safeguard, I believe, also. Now let's mount and move on. Hi! what's that? Look!"

Both men sprung to their feet and started back with horror. Dropping down from a gigantic mahogany tree which stood by the tent door swung a huge snake, slipping its great coils lower as its head swung free about two feet from the ground, and its eyes gazed impertinently in on their feast. A dead limb had given way under the pressure of a fold, and fallen with the noise at which Tom had started.

"Quick! A cutlass, Bourne. Go behind while I keep his attention!"

Bourne slipped out from beneath the tent upon the other side. Tom stood facing the swinging, horrid head, and, tearing off his hat, swung it in unison with the reptile's motions. The open mouth came slowly nearer, as the splendid coils slipped lower and lower. But Bourne was now at the tree. With one stroke of the heavy cutlass he gashed into the boa's body bent about the tree trunk. Another and another blow. The huge mass rolled into a squirming heap at their feet. They stood their distance now, while the natives drew near and slashed it into an unsightly mass.

"I hope, my man," said Tom, turning to the main guide, who was also the interpreter, "that this sort of visitor is not very common."

"Not many of 'em, sir. Them's few."

The morning march began. At the head moved the bushmen, clearing the way. Then the scientific work followed. About noon of the following day, while Seacomb and Bourne were busy with their instruments, Sam Clarke came back to say that the men refused to go on.

"And why?" asked Tom, drawing up his full stature from the instrument over which he had been bending.

"Because of the dreadful heat, sir, and——"

"Well, what other reason?"

"They keep lookin' up, sir, at the sky, and sayin' that it's comin'," replied Clarke, himself apparently affected by a contagion of the superstition, whatever it might be.

"What is coming, fellow?" sharply asked Tom. "I will myself go forward to the men."

Suiting the action to the word, Tom strode along the deep shade of the forest till he confronted the laborers

standing huddled beside their burdens cast upon the ground.

"My men, why do you complain? See, there is my horse. I am on foot like the rest of you. Now, you are as strong as I." Which was not true; for the noble form of the stalwart American boy towered above the best-developed man of their group. They feared him. He was capable of shouldering their strongest. Still they huddled together under the thick foliage, matted like a thatch and shook their heads, pointing upward.

"Why, you fools," exclaimed the American, "there's nothing to be seen but those bold Andes crags and the sky over the roaring river."

"It is the thunder, sir," said the interpreter. "We are in the storm's track. Go see."

Instantly Seacomb sprung up the acclivity, from crag to crag scaling the cliff, till he stood in full relief against the sky. As he appeared, his commanding figure, his fine glowing features bronzed by exposure, his attitude became at once interesting to even the unpoetic Bourne. With extended hand shading the eyes, gazing afar, the captain stamped his foot, excitedly shouting:

"Bourne, for Heaven's sake, come up here!"

Bourne obeyed with what haste he could. As he stepped out at length upon the table of rock by Seacomb's side, breathless with exertion, the latter said:

"Look over those peaks and see a tropic storm-cloud. See that solid silver press up, as if fresh molten and pouring from a furnace."

"Yes, and the black, shadowed mountains will answer very well for the furnace doors, Mr. Seacomb. But now look! That gray fringe against the bluish-black.

That means terrific wind. See the forests bend. Still we hear no thunder."

"No. There is no wind here, either. I cannot understand this dreadful stillness. Not a bird chirrup. See those old condors upon that shoulder of rock above us. How quiet they keep. Do you suppose they are afraid? I can knock this big hen over, I do believe."

And climbing up a little Tom struck the huge bird with a stone easily, when she fell flopping at their feet. She was so benumbed with terror that she offered small resistance as the young fellows bound her great legs with vines and tumbled her down to the astonished natives below. The condor afterward measured six feet from tip to tip of wings.

"Now see that cloud sweep down on us! It is a great mass of ink. Seacomb, the niggers were right. It is awful!"

"Well, Sam and Bill will house the instruments. As for ourselves, we are as safe here as down by that torrent. I am going to stand still just in this cleft, and see a thunder-storm in the Andes."

Crash on crash of thunder now reverberated along the cavernous mountains. The lightning was one continuous sheet of azure flame that outshone the blazing tropic day. The sublime roar of the coming rain and wind could now be distinctly heard. Yet no drops fell where the boys stood, holding each other by the hand. The huddled natives, down below, lay flat, gazing up at intervals with faces grotesque in their terror at the mad Americans full exposed to the "gods of the thunder."

"Did you see that, Tom?" shouted Bourne, growing familiar in the presence of the sublime.

"See what? The rocks away up there appear to fall.

I believe I have seen it two or three times yonder on that gray loose moss; pieces of stone plunge down as if by stroke—or it may be by jar.”

At that very word both of the young men were actually brought to their knees by a peal of thunder that seemed to crack the earth open somewhere.

“How long the rain tarries,” said Bourne.

“Why, man, in such a vision seconds seem hours. You haven’t stood here five minutes yet; and besides, we can see a stretch of forest here of more than fifty miles.”

“How wide do you reckon this forest, Seacomb?”

“I suppose that to the west or south there are five hundred miles of unbroken timber, into which no white man but ourselves ever penetrated this far.”

“Look at that condor! The storm has frightened him off at last. Ah, Tom, if we could only sail away like that! Away, away! See! far down toward the dear old ocean, where ships are, and human beings, and civilization, if he wishes to go so far. Down to Rio Janerio, where there may be letters for us from home. God knows when we’ll be able to get them,” said Bourne.

“Why, you little craven, you are homesick. Look up at the storm and forget it. It is the same God over these mountains and forests as over Vermont or Boston Common. There’s nothing here so cruel as Charles Shandy whom I told you of. I’d rather traverse the pampas than contend with monopoly. I——”

But the sentence died in Seacomb’s throat. The storm had burst upon them. In a moment they had been overwhelmed in misty darkness, so that Tom actually struck a light with his girdle lantern as they crouched in the shelter of the cavern. No words are adequate to

describe the swoop of the rain. It fell in torrents. It fell in sheets. It fell in spouts, waves—green, prismatic waves. It cast down frogs and small birds at their feet which had been caught up by its sweep across the uplands. Rivers, new-born, sprung with awful cataracts from above their heads. It was like going under the falls at Niagara. At one time the two young fellows had actually to turn face to the rock to keep their breath.

Meanwhile the sublimity of the sound was indescribably grand.

And now it was done. The burning sun came forth as suddenly as he had disappeared, his fiery ardor not a whit abated. The broad glory of the light flashing upon a million leaves, far as the eye could reach, Tom stood forth beholding. The boy exulted. He seemed king of the wilderness. For him all this majesty of display. He pulled off his hat and shouted in ecstasy. Then solemnly he repeated to himself:

“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the earth, behold, oh God, Thou art there.”

Turning to Bourne, Tom remarked:

“Shandy, with his millions, never saw such a sight. I thank the man for driving me hither. Homesick! Never! We’ll conquer the Andes! Come! Let’s go down.”

Steadily the party continued to work away at their task. Seacomb, by his personal courage and power of will, had supreme sway over the ignorant men who composed the bulk of his party. But no man could defend human flesh against the tropic fever. Tom became quite a physician; but his medicine-chest was fast being

exhausted. Kindness, enforced temperance and the utmost vigilance could not avail to keep poor honest Clarke alive. It was a mournful death and a sad, rude funeral, high up among the mountains. But Tom could bury him with a Christian's prayer.

Desertions also had by this time thinned their ranks, and in the heart of the Andes enlistments were impossible.

The force was within six weeks reduced to seven persons all told. In consequence, many of the rare flowers and botanical specimens, woods, ores, and naturalists' gems of every kind had to be abandoned. Yet enough were saved to be of great value and a decided addition to science.

To add to the perplexity which at last quite taxed Tom's resolution to the uttermost, the animals begun to give out. They now had but one horse, devoted to such as were sick, and one pack-mule loaded with canned provisions. Boats, save one, had been stored and left behind in faint hope that the ants might spare them. Game, such as was edible, was getting scarce. It seemed as if it would be impossible to return this way. Tom's mind nowadays was much occupied with the hope that he might descend the mountains upon the further side into Ecuador, and thence go down the coast to Peru. From thence his hope was to cross directly over by some one of the new railroads which he knew were constructing, and so reach Rio de Janeiro by the cross-country Brazilian caravans, and offer the fruits of his labors to the government of that vast empire.

One midday, as they were halting for dinner, Bourne being seated with Seacomb in the weather-worn tent, a fire of dry boughs blazing near—for the altitude they

had now attained had changed summer into almost winter—the interpreter presented himself, wishing “to speak to the captain.”

“Well, Pedro, what is it?”

“We think, sir, that we cannot go any further.”

“What?” said Tom sternly.

“It is presumed the captain understands.”

“What will you do then?” asked Tom, at length.

“Help you to go back, sir,” was the reply.

“Go tell the men I will come and talk with them,” after a moment’s thought Tom answered.

As the man went out Tom said to Bourne:

“I have expected this. They will not wait to talk with me. Savages are like children. Within an hour the scamps will be headed down the mountain. I shall let them take their guns, poor fools, or they will starve by the way. I paid them yesterday. It was foolish, but I feared that they might rob us, and wanted to treat them like men.”

“But, cap,” broke in Bill Krank, who had caught an inkling of the interpreter’s errand and drawn near enough to overhear it, “what are we poor devils to do?”

“Do, Bill? You do not want to travel the same road over again, do you? when, by pressing on, in a few weeks we can strike civilization on the Pacific slope.”

“Ah, sir, weeks! The captain’s weeks are long, and there have been many of them,” was the man’s reply.

“Mr. Seacomb, can we three men survive, defend ourselves, lug this freight, and get out alone?” asked Mr. Bourne, his young face drawn into hard lines.

“I think we three Yankees can do anything to secure life, if we all act the man and trust in God,” slowly replied Tom. “Besides, is it not just as easy, easier to



go on indeed? We have secured substantially all that we set out for. Here are the results that make our fortune." And Tom laid his hands upon a knapsack full of manuscripts, which he himself always carried.

"Heaven help us!" groaned his young companion, dropping his head into his hands.

"Heaven will; but just now we must help ourselves," said Tom, springing to his feet and grasping a revolver in either hand. "That's what those ingrates are doing. Come on, Bourne and Bill."

All three white men then ran swiftly to where the Indians and negroes were congregated about the baggage. They were pilfering right and left. The thieves had turned out the contents of provision bags, ammunition sacks, clothing bales, indeed everything that could by the remotest possibility be available to their needs or fancies. Quick work had they made of it, for they seemed to have fallen to the instant they had made known their mutinous intent to the interpreter. Indeed two or three of the men were actually starting off with their booty down the mountains.

It was a hazardous thing to do, but Tom was always ready for an emergency. Springing in front of the most advanced man he quietly said :

"Interpreter, tell them that, though this is a foul bargain, yet to spare their lives through the forests each man can take his gun and twenty cartridges, and that is all. Do you hear?"

With that he cocked both revolvers. Bill Krank and Mr. Bourne did the same.

The black faces scowled and hesitated.

"Lay down everything and trust me, or we'll see who shall die last!" cried Seacomb.

The interpreter repeated the words. Right is the same under all skies, and some faint impulse of its holy authority beats in even the savage breast. The men obeyed. The division was faithfully made. The natives departed.

"And now we are alone," said Tom, as the last man disappeared down the mountain path. "If any crazy boy in America thinks it rare fun to strike off for adventure into a new country, I wish the little fool stood where we do now."

"Are you losing heart, Mr. Seacombs?" asked the now quite wretched Bourne.

"Not losing heart at all, my dear fellow, but facing the truth. We three have got to be men, every inch of us, and stand by each other, trusting in God."

"Well," replied Bourne faintly, "the excitement or something else has brought on another chill. I must go into the tent and shake."

"Pshaw, man! I'll give you quinine enough to pull you through shortly. Never fear. Bill, lend a hand; help Mr. Bourne up to the tent. It is near sunset. We'll not go on till to-morrow."

But that evening, as the great, grand day went down in splendor toward the unseen Pacific, as the evening stars came out and hung above the cold, spectral peaks of the Andes, as ten thousand thoughts of home came winging over land and sea to fill Tom's soul, as he watched the mounting up of fever in his young companion's veins, and there was silence save for the tread of the one sentinel by the tent door, or the crackling of fagots on the fire, the heart would have failed him but for his trust in Heaven's blessing on his own iron will. "Alone, in the heart of the Andes,"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A RIVAL'S WOOING.



MISS KEARSARGE, I may say that you are cruel."

"I should hope not, Mr. Shandy. What I tell you is certainly the popular opinion here in Montpelier, both of your transactions and your father's."

"What, that we are monopolizing the railroads of the State?"

"Yes, and with great injustice and hardship inflicted upon many of their original projectors," replied the spirited girl.

They were strolling down one of the grandly shaded streets of the little city of Montpelier. The July sun had sunk to rest with a broad, red glare yet lingering in the sky, and blushing roseate upon roof and gable, lending the fair face of Miss Kearsarge a most exquisite tint, which made her surpassingly beautiful in young Charles Shandy's eyes. Her fairy dress of pure white floated about her graceful form with witchery of added charm. Her blue, speaking eyes lent animation to her words. There was, however, something in the seriousness of the usually laughing face; something in the constrained air with which the young girl kept her escort at a distance as they strolled; something in the quick, impatient motions with which ever and anon she thrust back the wealth of blonde hair from her hot cheeks; something in the nervous twirl of her summer

hat by one of its strings at arm's length, which plainly told of great excitement of mind. You felt sure that all was not sweet agreement between these two; that it was not quite a lover's ramble under the ancient trees at twilight.

Yet where was a more scrupulous escort than that young fellow? So thought the villagers as they saw them pass. Dressed plainly, yet richly. Small—for Sadie could but contrast him with the manly, broad-shouldered Tom, so far away—trim, excessively polite, college-bred and highly proper in conversation, though naturally dull rather than brilliant in mental endowments, Shandy smiled and smiled, as he walked on beside the radiant creature and did his best with his suit. It was up-hill work. The fellow had no warmth of affection. Cold, like his father, polished as his father was not, eminently proper so that he even “detested cigars”—which was well for his thin blood—he plucked the shrubbery through the fences as they passed and attempted to talk botany after Miss Sadie's last remark.

“I am not in an esthetical mood to-night, Mr. Shandy,” said the young lady. “Isn't it true now, that you and your father, with other wealthy men, are trying to crush out all opposition and master these railways?”

“Pardon me; but what should a young girl know or care about such things?” he inquired.

“Perhaps nothing, in your estimation. Yet I do; and you do not seem quite to set me down as a strong-minded girl and to be avoided.”

“You are charming—despite your business bent. But a lady will only confuse her pretty head in vain over such things. What do you care for the scuffles of us

men? You are not likely to have much business cares thrust into your bright life."

"Because my father is a rich man? I am his only child. Since my mother's death I have been the matron of our home, both in town and up to Lakeside."

"When do you go up to that splendid retreat?" he quickly asked. "Your father has invited me—I suppose you know?"

"Yes, he told me. We go next week. It will be the first of August."

But she did not add anything to her father's invitation. Her loyalty of heart to her father was evidently at the bottom of much of her amiability to this young man. Any observer could see that.

"But," said the young lady, persistently returning to an unwelcome topic, "you do not yet vindicate before a simple girl the business methods of your father and——"

"And your own father," put in Shandy.

"Well, and my father, yourself, and various other rich men," she said.

"I cannot."

"No, I thought not."

"Because the subject is too intricate. Yet it is all right, by every law of the land," he continued.

"Right, and you cannot explain it to a simple-hearted friend? Right by the law? Human laws, you mean. Right to send forth, ruined, the young, strong, industrious and good to wander the world over, beginning again in beggary?"

And she turned her blue eyes full upon him. She instantly regretted having spoken, for she had revealed her heart to him, and he was quick to say:

"If you will forgive me for saying it, you are thinking about a circumstance; an individual indeed; a young man whom we encountered in the office of this new cross-country road here."

He dared not venture to speak Tom Seacomb's name.

Perhaps it was the street which they were pacing which ran down past Tom's old home; perhaps, however, it was that all the while, for these weary weeks the aching heart of the girl had been never a moment without its thought of the absent, and all the more that her father reiterated the false story of Tom's disgrace and Shandy pressed his suit. At any rate, for some reason she had been surprised into speaking what had never been discussed between them in all their courteous but guarded interviews. It seemed best to put a bold face on now.

"Yes," she replied, "I was thinking of Thomas Seacomb. Why, sir, it was I who found him a little vagabond on Acton poor-farm. I taught him how to read, mere girl that I was, in a country school-house mission which my good mother established."

"Indeed! This is romantic," quietly responded Shandy, hardly concealing a sneer.

The quick ears of the young lady detected the contemptuous tone, however. The noble girl drew herself up proudly, fairly bristling with kindly woman's compassion as her heart recalled the old memories. She seemed almost to stand taller than the man. Her form, in perfect womanly grace, seemed to shame his mean stature; the silent indignation of a good heart swell against this young scion of wealth he had never earned, who sneered at a genuine character.

"Yes," she continued; "I knew this young gentle-

man well. He was always of generous and manly intent from a boy. His father was his burden, not his helper. His mother—alas for her! His sister was, and is, a lovely girl. He alone housed them, before himself thinking of them. See! here is the house now; that is the home."

The lady showed a disposition to pause under the elms and maples that arched in the evening shadows before the ancient dwelling.

"Yes; I have had the place pointed out to me before," languidly responded Shandy, evincing a decided inclination to move on.

"No; we will return to the hotel, if you please," said Miss Kearsarge, noticing the movement, "unless you would like to sit down here on this seat a moment while I tell you more of this poor-born lad."

"Perhaps you can tell me," said Shandy, incautiously yielding to his pique, "why so fine a fellow turned out so badly. His latest exploit in this community was more astonishing than anything in his astonishing career, I believe."

"He seemed to be a leader of those railroad riots last April. Seemed, I say. But it could not be real. Oh, that dreadful night!" she added. "I cannot think of it. But I do not believe wrong of him. No, I will not!"

And the sadness of her sweet face was pitiful to look upon.

Shandy was not utterly void of sensibility, such as it was. He was certainly cautious enough to desire to relieve her, had he known just how to extricate them both from a painful situation. But then he had his own suit to press, and it seemed as if there was no stopping-place

in the effort to dislodge his rival short of his destruction. Yet he must not make the girl hate himself by the boldness of his attack on the absent one. Indeed bold, rough badness was hardly the younger Shandy's method. He was subtle.

Her thoughts, on the other hand, had she spoken them, were, "How *could* he have gone away without an interview? My father? Tom should have shared my battle with poor, dear papa. Stung with a sense of injustice? I would have helped him to right his fair fame again. Broken under defeat? Defeat should not have separated us. Gone to rebuild his fortunes? He knows I do not love nor lack money; and why should not mine be his? If only men were not so high-spirited! Can it be that he was coarse-grained at bottom? Is it true that there is so much base blood as my father says? That you cannot make silver out of lead! His Boston letters. They were burning with self-humiliation. He hopes I will yet know all his noble intent—that he trusts my friendship, and asks no more than friendship till he returns. Yet gone to sea without my reply! What dull, proud dunces are these men. How little they know a woman's heart. This other match. My father pressing me. Tom gone; and what can I say?"

"Miss Sadie," begun Shandy, rising at length from the seat which Tom's hands had fashioned about the old maple, "it is perhaps time that we return."

"Yes, yes," responded she, "let us be going. Ah! did you see her, the young lady to whom I bowed across the lawn? That is Miss Bessie Seacomb, sister to the young gentleman whom you know. Poor girl! she will think I am too cool. We have not met for two months. She seems to avoid me. Oh, dear! Friends, friends!



It's so hard to please everybody. It is hers to call on me."

"Do not count me among fickle friends," said Shandy, very impressively. "May I not show you how constant I can be?"

"I do not wish you to speak so to me, Mr. Shandy. I wish—I want—oh, I know not what I want. Let us walk faster. It is getting late," said the girl.

"Certainly. We will walk fast and leave these scenes behind. Why not leave behind all that troubles you? If the past is sad, it is not your fault. You have been an angel of good to—to all whom you have tried to serve. If any have proved unworthy——"

"Stop! Let us change the channel of our thoughts," she cried, as if in actual pain.

"Forgive me once more," he cried, grasping her hand with something actually like fervor of feeling. "I go back to Boston to-morrow for a week, I am invited to your father's house on returning to the country." She had resolutely regained her hand; but he finished his sentence just the same. "Will *you* welcome me, even by ever so little, if I come?"

They stood quite still. For a moment that seemed an age to both, she did not answer him. Finally she said :

"Mr. Shandy, you are to be my father's guest. I am his obedient daughter—and the hostess. Come next week."

"Thank you, thank you!" cried he warmly. And they quickened their pace toward the hotel.

In the garden of Tom's old home sat his loving, loyal sister, under the moonbeams. Unkindly moon which revealed actions, but reported not words. 422

dove-cote was just before Bessie Seacomb's eyes. She spoke to the doves as if they could hear.

"Rolland, you flew far with my noble brother's faithful message to that faithless girl. But I had seen before, and heard by the village gossip, what my eyes have seen again to-night, and I would not cast his heart beneath their proud feet. She doubts our Tom! Her heart is breaking! Let it break if she doubts. No, Rolland, Rolland, I never gave thy message—nor will I. Oh, would to Heaven I could send thee flying back to him, with one true, sisterly heart of love, where now, maybe, all disheartened, he lies dreaming, or maybe dying."

So do we sometimes, poor human souls, work at cross purposes and defeat our best purposes with the best intent. For Sadie Kearsage also sat by her window and watched the summer moon across the meridian with eyes of weeping.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### STRUGGLES FOR LIFE.



WELL, MY honest fellow, come in here and look at him," said Seacomb one afternoon as he emerged from the tent. "I'm afraid he's dying."

As the two men entered, there lay poor Bourne, his ashen face turned up, his jaw fallen, his eyes staring vacantly into space. A fly walked across his eyelid and he did not seem to notice it. The poor boy was wasted to a skeleton.

"Cap'n, I can't see that he breathes. Does he?"

"You observe the motion of this feather," replied Tom, holding the plumage of a bird recently shot over Bourne's mouth.

"I'm afeared, cap'n, you and I are left alone arter to-night," added Bill Krank, in a tone of utter despair.

"I say, Bill; I had a chill last night again myself. It is the third one. I did not mention it to you. I'm a sick man myself, except that I'll never give up, never!"

But the plucky lad sunk down into his hammock in a way that gave the lie to his brave words.

After a few moments he added :

"We must get out of this fever den. We have been here now just where those mutineers left us for a month. Why the monkeys are overrunning us. Look up there?"

And Tom pointed just above his head, where on the thick, matted tree-tops three huge monkeys were looking

down upon them as they ate the stolen provisions from the sick man's cot.

"I'll kill that big one, sir. He'll make a good breakfast to-morrow."

And with a quick movement Bill hurled a stone straight into the creature's face, dispatching him.

Tom looked dreamily on. At length he said:

"Old fellow, we must go down to the coast. It is the Pacific Ocean or death to us all three. I shall be a whole man with a sniff of the sea. And it is that or nothing that will save poor Bourne."

"By Jupiter, cap'n, that's a nice speech. I've been waitin' to hear you say that for two weeks."

The honest fellow fairly danced about with delight. But after a few turns, happening to glance at Bourne in his unconscious helplessness, he began to bite his hard forefinger through a bristling mustache, and at length said:

"How 'bout him, cap'n?"

"We must carry him!"

Tom spoke fiercely. His eyes burned in his own hollow cheeks like fire-coals. Staggering to his feet from the hammock, he cried:

"Carry him! Carry him! Start now! I will never sleep another night here. Oh, I feel a strange madness creeping on! Am I going insane?"

He stood holding his forehead in both hands and gazing off over the sweeping landscape, which from their high lodge could be measured for leagues to the hazy horizon.

"Great God! Is not that the sea? The kind, kind sea?"

"No, no, cap'n," said Bill, soothingly, his ignorant

yet sympathizing soul paralyzed with amazement at sight of such loss of self-control in his iron-willed young master.

The man brought cool water from a cleft in the rocks. He pressed bravely upon Seacomb. He caught his hands and chafed them as lovingly as a sister could have done. Yet Tom still stood with that far-away gazing, his broad chest heaving as if each stifling breath would be the last.

At length he turned, calmed with a great effort of will. As if speaking to himself, he said:

"God only knows how hard this journey has been—every step since I left old Montpelier. Nothing but will—and God. Oh, is Shandy satisfied now? Has he caused me to suffer enough? It is the summer time. At this moment he lounges in his palace among the hills, fanned and perfumed by breezes over flowery lawns."

"My dear cap, I'm gettin' the things together," said Bill, bustling about.

"Yes, yes. The sun is yet four hours high on these peaks. We'll go. Put all the baggage on our one horse. The rubber boat, take that. Take as many of the provisions as you can load on. Don't forget the ammunition, but in addition stock all the cartridge-boxes. We have two revolvers to a man. Put one of Bourne's in your belt; I'll take the other. I'll take the portfolios, with all the papers, and carry them on top of my knapsack."

And so on, in a nervous, excited way, Tom continued to give directions to the obedient Bill Krank.

In an incredibly short time everything was ready. The baggage to be abandoned was heaped together by

itself. The tent was struck, and Bourne lay motionless and unobserving under the open sky.

"Now set fire to that pile," was Tom's order.

The match was applied, and the flames mounted upward like a beacon upon the brow of the mountain. Then the two men approached Mr. Bourne. After Tom had forced some cordial and the hourly dose of medicine down his gurgling throat, he leaned over the prostrate form and said:

"Bourne, I say, dear boy!" There was the faintest sign of a responsive movement to the eyes. Tom continued: "I think you understand. At any rate, we are going on—to the sea. Think of it! It is your only chance. Come, Bill, take up his hammock by one end; I'll stagger under the other. The horse must be allowed to follow. By the compass and the map—which is all guess-work of these Spaniards, I find—the river is here."

Tom pointed to the northwest with a hand that shook like palsy.

So began this heroic journey. Three hundred miles lay between them and the sea, as the bird flew. The city of Bogota, capital of the United States of Colombia, was probably the same distance to the northward.

The splendid nerve of Thomas Seacomb fighting the battle of life, seeking to rescue his friend, whom he would not abandon to save himself, now shone clear as the sun. The mind 's ever master of the body. But that which sustained this noble mind was something more than human will. Every step Tom's slipping, weakening feet strode on was a step in prayer to God, his "only Savior." There is a piety that shines easily in splendid parlors, with prosperity all about one. The

elder Shandy had said that "his son Charley had never caused him a moment's uneasiness in his life." Well, but how would the milk-and-water muscles of the pampered son of wealth have proved himself in such an hour as this?

"I think we are getting down to the upper rapids of the river Magdalene. Yes, hark!"

Tom listened long, with his fevered palm to his burning ear.

The sick man's hammock was tied to two trees as they rested. The sufferer seemed no worse, thank Heaven. But Tom was worse. The tremendous exertion of five hours' struggle along the rocks was telling upon him. Bill Krank still held out well.

"There's the river! Hurra!" suddenly shouted Tom.

"What now, master?" asked Bill. "Shall we camp for the night?"

"Camp? Never!" was the instant reply. "To the boat as quick as we can. The current will take us on. We can sleep, watch and watch."

Within half an hour they were in the boat. The faithful horse stood on the shore gazing after them, stripped of all his burdens. He seemed to half-realize that he was to be abandoned, and walked along a little stretch of shore beside them as the boat slowly swung into the current.

"It's too bad, Bill!" cried Tom, whose kindly face almost showed signs of tears, so weakened and impressible was he. "I'm afraid the old friend will starve."

"Shall I put a bullet into him?" asked Bill.

Tom hesitated. After a moment's thought he answered:

"There are no Indians within a hundred miles to pick him up. It's a wilderness. We have foraged for him in the clefts and ledges for grass-tufts ever since we left the Amazons. Quick! Fire!"

The horse raised his head with pricked ears, his great brown eyes peering after them piteously as the boat drifted away under the overhanging foliage above the deeper waters. The animal actually whinnied out to them. Crack went the rifle. The smoke floated up in a little cloud to blind Tom's vision. After a while he said:

"Was your aim true, Bill?"

"He won't starve to death, captain."

Then, by night, by day, the little boat floated upon the wild river toward the pampas of the Indians, the earliest inhabited regions that they could hope to reach.

It was something like two weeks later on that, in the gray of the breaking day, Mr. Bourne, who had so far recovered as to be able to take his place in the easy duty of watch at the boat's prow, feebly uttered this warning:

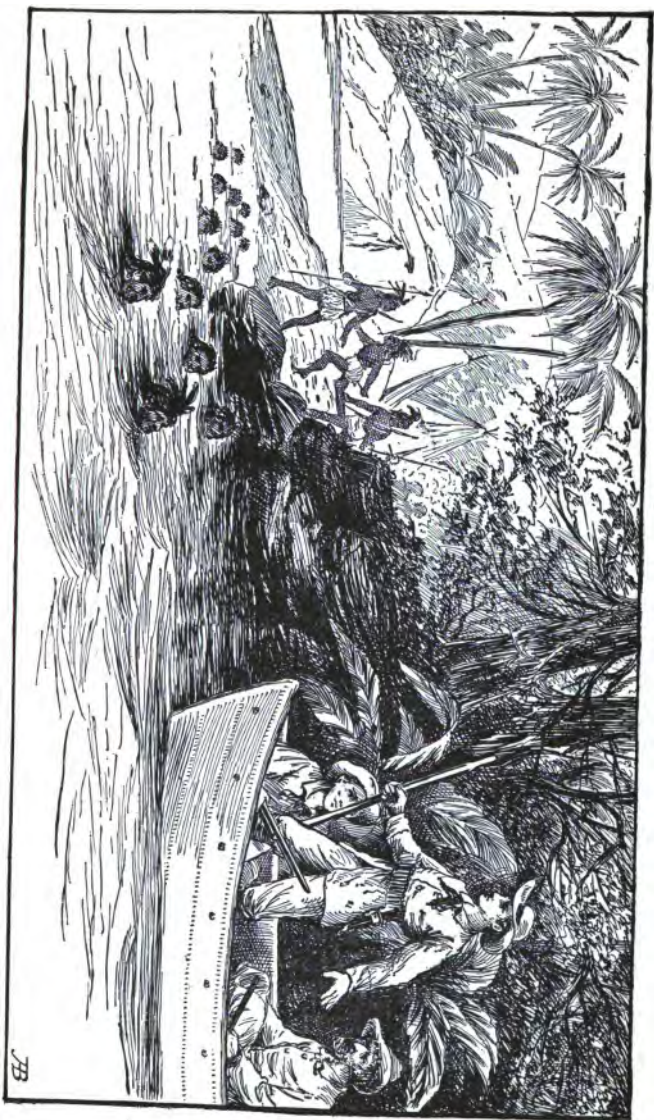
"Indians! I am sure, Seacomb, I saw unmistakable signs of them twenty minutes back."

Tom, who reclined with steering paddle over the stern, immediately shot the boat under cover of some broad-leaved plants nearer in shore. But it was too late. Groping forward upon hands and knees, past the sleeping form of Bill Krank, he soon exclaimed:

"Look, Bourne! There are the wigwams, as true as you live. These fellows are the savages of southeastern Colombia. I've been dreading this ever since we started. Do they see us?"

"Yes. Look!" whispered Bourne, feeling in a feeble way for his rifle, at the same time waking Bill with a kick.





"TOM BOLDLY ALLOWED THE BOAT TO DRIFT TOWARD THE SAVAGES."

"For Heaven's sake, boys," fairly hissed Tom, "don't draw sight on them. Wait till it's fight or die. What a swarm of them are on us!"

Tom then sent the boat boldly out into the opening and let it drift straight toward the landing, where, on shore or already swimming toward them, were perhaps thirty warriors and their squaws. The savages were fierce in aspect, nearly naked, with hideously painted bodies, but armed only in primitive fashion with rudest though abundant implements of attack. Our party saw at a glance that their adversaries were at present more struck with wonder than anger. Evidently, as Tom had hoped, they were unaccustomed to the sight of white men. Standing up at full height in the boat the three Americans suffered themselves to be towed to the shore by a half-dozen black hands that grasped the gunwales.

As the good craft grounded on the pebbly beach the black scamps made it evident, by pantomime and unintelligible grunts and yells, that the captives were to step ashore. Bourne said:

"Tom, you will not spring into that ring of tomahawks to be chopped up?"

"Do as I do, sir," replied Tom in a low breath. "I am commander. Obey me without a word."

"Yes, sir," answered his two companions. "But we are all three able to fight for life, remember," added Bourne.

They all three stood upon the sand, and the savages and their women just about to lay hands on them, when Tom gave the order:

"Fold up the boat."

Bill Krank pulled her, with one giant motion, upon the strand and turned the air-cock in her side. In-

stantly, with a sharp, hissing sound, the imprisoned air escaped from the inflated chambers in her rubber sides. What had been a shapely water-craft now lay a shapeless white mass of folds. The savages drew back with sudden fear; and they offered no interruption as Tom and Bill threw the mass into the shape of a huge bundle, covering out of sight everything save the rifles, which Bourne gathered in his arms.

The Indians seemed ignorant of any language with which our travelers had met in their long journey. Hence by signs, pointing with the hand, Seacomb endeavored to make them understand their errand; "peacefully intending to go on down the river to the ocean."

The Indians now withdrew a little, still keeping a sharp lookout on their strange captives. After what seemed a council three of the larger Indians returned and took each a man by the arm, leading them up the bank into the center of the village. Tom looked ruefully back toward the precious bundle of the boat, but dared not make any effort to secure it. Fortunately, the savages seemed to regard it with superstitious awe, some of the squaws actually kneeling before it, mumbling supposable prayers.

The three Americans were now forced into a sitting posture, while the powwow went on.

"They are all smaller men than we," said Bill, cautiously, to his companions.

"Yes; and if I was up to my usual strength," added Tom, "we would astonish the little fellows. Bourne, you didn't know I was a practical gymnast, did you?"

But poor Bourne could scarcely hold his weary head erect, though making every effort to appear strong.

Suddenly the Indians begun to form in a circle. Men, women, children, and tottering old age stood round about. The warriors drew their rude, strong bows with flint arrows. It seemed the moment of fate. Tom's watchful eye saw the movement, and he said:

"Sing, boys! Mary had a little lamb!"

Bill struck up the air. Tom sung a magnificent bass, rich and deep. Bourne sung a fine tenor. Often had they made the woods ring with this school-boy's melody. It was a curious expedient of Tom the Ready. The really fine music of the trio floated out upon the war-like scene.

The Indians had never heard music before. Three parts in melody were to them like enchantment. They dropped their bows. They looked at each other in astonishment. Some seemed to come as near laughing as a savage ever does. Some frowned and opened their mouths in imitation. The squaws begun to whine. The wolfish dogs of the village settled back on their haunches and howled piteously, as a civilized dog will often do at sound of a piano.

"Look here, my friends," said Tom, springing to his feet, none hindering.

The young man caught hold of a projecting bough about ten feet from the ground, and made a trapeze of it. Vaulting over it, he caught it with both arms behind his back, and begun to turn round and round in a way familiar to all gymnastic youth in America. The savages looked on with perfect amazement.

"Presto!" shouted Bourne.

Instantly Tom caught the bough in the angle formed by bending the legs at the knee, whirling round as

before, swift as a fly-wheel. The wild men begun to show signs of awe and reverence.

As the young athlete whipped off and struck upon his feet, he pulled a burning-glass from his blue jacket and drew the focus on the old chief's very nose. The Indian sprung up, howling and rubbing his proboscis with perfectly frantic gestures. Tom then sent the bright spot round from nose to nose. It was an unusually powerful lens. The young performer soon had half the circle dancing with affright. He capped the climax by spotting the little round stomach of the chief's baby, which was squatting in the dust before the royal wigwam door. The squawling quack of the precious little savage set the whole village in mad uproar.

"It was too bad," cried Tom, laughing with his companions, "but I couldn't resist the temptation."

The Indians now approached the three white men with the worshipful manners that the inhabitants of Malta exhibited toward St. Paul. They bowed down to them. They poured rare tropic fruits into their laps. They loaded them with trinkets of silver and gold. They motioned to them frantically to depart, pointing to the river.

"If I could make them understand me, I would not owe my escape to idolatry," said Tom. "It feels mighty queer to be worshiped as a god. But come, inflate the boat. To the sea, the sea!"

No sooner were the three Yankees again safely in their boat and out of sight than Tom Seacomb fell back exhausted. The exertions he had made told heavily on a sick man, and such he had been. But as days added to days his splendid constitution rallied. The nervous shock seemed to act better than medicine. For three

weeks more the little party floated on with varying fortunes, recovering strength and spirits as they drew nearer to civilized man.

It was on the last day of September that the little party drew up their craft at the wharves of the small city of Bogota, capital of the United States of Colombia. Finding the authorities of the sleepy republic comparatively indifferent upon the subject of his explorations, Seacomb promptly resolved to repair at once to Rio Janeiro, to offer the same to the enterprising Dom Pedro, emperor of that great Brazil whose vast extent he had traversed for twelve hundred miles. The plucky fellow little knew what lay between him and the realization of profits from his venturesome undertaking when he left Montpelier, now nearly six months ago. As little did he realize the high and exciting scenes in the capital of the generous monarch whom he now proposed to visit with his portfolio, or the extent of the benefits to ensue to himself.

"Good-by, Bourne. Bill, you too have been a faithful friend. Safe voyage home." So said Tom Seacomb on the dock at St. Buenaventura.

"Success to you, cap'n," responded the honest Bill.

"Ay, Mr. Seacomb," added Mr. Bourne, wringing Tom's hand. "May God reward you; I owe my life to you. We shall make the Isthmus ahead of you. But I do wish you saw your way clear to go home with us."

Tom turned away and said nothing, pacing thoughtfully back to his hotel and a fortnight's work on his papers.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### TO PLEASE HIS SON.



**W**HILE TOM SEACOMB is waiting to embark for Panama and thence along the Caribbean Sea, voyaging toward Rio Janiero, let us look in upon those things that also greatly concern him five thousand miles away in New England.

It is an October day. The foliage about the borders of Lake Champlain is rich in changeful color. The mown fields are everywhere like beautiful lawns. Harvesters are at work among russet corn and apple orchards. The Kearsarge family still linger for another month before returning to their Boston house for the winter.

Seated in the library of his splendid home by the table-side sits Sadie Kearsarge's father, so busy with his affairs that he scarce casts a glance out of the broad windows upon the most enchanting landscape. His private secretary, who follows him everywhere like a shadow, sits also at his tasks beneath the towering bookshelves which line the room.

"Come in!" shouts Mr. Kearsarge, in response to a rap at the door, and straightening back in his chair to view his visitor, the handsome face, fringed with snow-white whiskers, glowing with ruddy health.

"I come from the Union Railway Company," responded a plain, business-like person, evidently a confidential clerk, who knew nothing but to obey orders. He stood hat in hand.

"Well, sir, have a chair? What is your errand?" asked Mr. Kearsarge.

"The company offer you the market price for your stock in the V. C. Railroad," replied the human machine blandly.

"Zounds! they do?" exclaimed Kearsarge, springing forward in his chair that rolled across the marble floor.

"But what if I do not want to sell?"

"Do I understand that you will not sell to the Union?"

"By heavens, that's just it. Shandy has got ready to throw me overboard, has he? This giant and his crew with their millions may be richer than I am, but I happen to know secrets enough about their methods to be troublesome if they freeze me out."

"Then I am to understand that you decline to retire from the Union? Won't sell?" clacked the machine-like clerk, perfectly cool.

"Yes, sir. That's about it. What then?" asked Mr. Kearsarge, his ruddy face growing pale with rage.

"Then, sir, pardon me, but I am to say, in that unfortunate event, that you begin war with the Union?"

"With this accursed monopoly, of which Shandy is one of the sanctimonious leaders. He gives his thousands to found schools and foster ostentatious benevolences. But how does he get his money? By just such damnable oppressions as he played on Tom Seacomb, and I suppose scores of other men, and now wants to play on me. The blood-thirsty crew has got through with me, it seems, has used me all it could, and now——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Kearsarge, I am but a broker, in the service of this great Union. You asked me what



next, if you declined to sell out and get out. Then I am to say to you that the company will give you thirty days to close up your marble quarries at Acton, which must send their products over the V. C. road."

"That is," said Kearsarge, starting to his feet, but otherwise quite collected now, "that they will make freights so high to me, discriminate against me, that I cannot afford to get my stone to the down-country markets. I know all about it. Haven't I been base enough to have a hand in it all? But I trusted that Shandy. He seemed so fair, and talked temperance and virtue so much. Man, this will rob me of a hundred thousand dollars."

The old man paced the room, excited by far too much for one of his full habit.

"We will give you twenty-five thousand dollars for the marble quarries," said the broker quietly.

"You scoundrel, and tool of scoundrels! Why, the quarries bring me in that amount yearly. I'll talk no more with you. Get out of my house, sir!" and he threw open the library door

"I'm accustomed to a little irritation on the part of gentlemen," calmly replied the broker, as Mr. Kearsarge's private secretary arose as if to soften his master.

"Yes, I presume so," responded Kearsarge. "Any man who acts for the monopoly that you serve has probably grown hardened to the throes of many victims. I say get out."

"Thirty days we give you to decide to yield to us, remember."

"I'll take thirty centuries! Go!"

The door closed behind the tool of the extortioners. The old man fell back in his chair, covering his face

with his hands, and sat silent for a long time, the pen of his faithful secretary scratching on at the neighboring desk. After some moments Mr. Kearsarge looked up, saying:

"Poor, honest Tom Seacomb, thou art avenged at last! I wish I could see thy bright face—except that I should be ashamed to look upon it."

The scribbling writer silently went on with his tasks. The elder gentleman arose, pacing the floor. At length, turning sharply on his heel, he said:

"Do you know anything of Seacomb's whereabouts, Mr. Lasher?"

"No, sir," replied the secretary. "But you doubtless know who could tell you in your own house."

"Yes, yes. Go out and send Sadie in, dear girl. How have I sinned against her true heart. Stay. We shall, of course, fight this monopoly."

"Do you think so, sir?" submissively yet dubiously asked the confidential secretary.

"Why, of course, confound 'em!"

"We cannot, sir. They will strip you like a beggar. They have millions, we only a few hundred thousands. They have the courts, the legislature and the very governors of some of these States. Stop and think, I pray you. You are excited by a great wrong just now. But do not throw your fortune all away. What do you care for them? Better sacrifice a few thousands than to fight them."

"Man!" exclaimed the trembling financier, "I am so involved with them that they can reduce me to nothing unless I can show them that I am able to hold my own."

"But for that very reason you must submit. You have no ready funds to bear the expense of their oppression."

"Oh, for two hundred thousand dollars ready cash! What if Seacomb should return, having struck a gold mine somewhere? But what a fool I am. Those things happen only in story-books."

"And yet, sir," the secretary went on, "that boy is full of invention. He's a wonder, sir, we young fellows used to think."

"Go call my daughter."

The secretary retired, and very soon a sweet voice was heard at the library door.

"Shall I come in, papa?"

"Come in, my daughter," and the old man put his arms about the graceful form of his child, leading her to the window.

He kissed her upon her fair forehead, brushing back the waves of sunny hair therefrom with a tremulous hand.

"What is it, papa, dear?" she asked, looking up with her truthful eyes into his troubled face.

"My darling, there are but you and me in the world to care for each other. You are your mother over again, as I knew her long ago before life had grown so hard."

As he paused, she said:

"You will not vex yourself with—with anything like confession to your own child, papa. Do not try it. I can read it all."

"Thank you! Thank you! You spare me. Nevertheless I must speak out this much: that I have wronged you twice. Seacomb—you understand," and he bent over and kissed her again and again eagerly. "And you were keener than I to detect the moral wrong in this monopoly, this crushing out of small owners that

we big ones might own all. You read the Shandys better than I."

"Well, my own father, go on to tell me what I can do to help you. It is terrible to see you so shaken. Say no more of regrets."

She flung her arms about his neck and cast herself upon his knee as he sunk into his great chair.

"The Shandy's and the ring mean to ruin me." He then explained to her the situation. "Now where is Tom Seacomb? Is he rich or poor? Could he be recalled? Together he and I could prove such damning things against the ring as would break them; for Tom must know just how the books of that road which he built stood at the time they begun to run it. Would he forgive an old mercenary, selfish fellow like me? Would he return and fight for you?"

The girl made no reply, but hid her face on her father's neck. Observing her silence he went on.

"I have been very selfish, but it was for your sake. I wanted you to be very rich, and a foremost figure in society. Then, too, a business man, in the struggles of great affairs, often forgets everything else but his iron purpose to win a victory. God forgive me. I haven't a great many years left. I'll do right the rest of the way, if I lose everything. Shall I?"

"Yes, yes, papa. Say just that. You have been troubled in conscience by the deeds of the ring for months past. I've seen it."

"Do you love Tom Seacomb still?"

"Oh, papa!"

She kissed him, and hid again her glowing face upon his shoulder.

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"My precious child! And you were seeking to obey my wishes to the extent of forgetting him?"

"Not forgetting, papa. But I could live alone with you as long as you lived," she added.

"And you were trying to like this young Shandy?"

"I gave that up, sir, long ago. There is nothing in him to love. But I did try to treat him well, because you desired it—and because——"

"Well?"

"Because of that great cloud that seemed to rest on poor Tom's name. Papa, was he a base rioter and law-breaker?"

She turned her blue eyes full upon him, her radiant face almost angelic in its sorrowful solicitude, as she waited for a reply.

"No, no, no. It was all managed; and I was villain enough to wink at it all. The Shandys seemed to have the ear of the newspapers. Oh, fool, fool, that I have been! Why, I believe that Tom acted the hero that night, if the truth was known, and saved the town from fire and murder. It is said—Black undertook to tell me the story once, but I would scarcely listen—that alone Tom Seacomb dared the round-house full of angry devils, and opened the doors to the authorities. Why, my dear?"

Sadie was weeping violently in his arms. The long pent-up affection of months, the tremendous constraint of will to obey her father, now relaxed; the old trust in and longing for her manly lover made tempest in her woman's heart. The old man broke his iron will, and tears rolled down his face. He held her close to his heart. She was his all. He soothed her with words

and caresses; and it seemed to him, as well it might, that he had never looked upon a face so divinely beautiful as that one which now smiled through its tears, the eyelids shutting in the great peace that they would not attempt yet to reveal. Thus sat they long. Heaven help them! The sunset flashed aslant in upon them in their repose.

Suddenly a sound of horses' feet upon the gravel drive.

The young girl started to her feet instantly.

"Papa, he is come!"

"Who, my child?"

"Young Shandy. You know he has presumed upon his standing invitation."

"And, alas! I gave it to him. You knew he was coming to-night?"

"Yes. He said that the next time he came he had no doubt you would want to see him. In a mysterious way he hinted at some great service he could probably soon do for my father."

"Go to your room and I will have Mr. Lasher bring him right in. I'm ready to see him."

The color left the old man's face as he spoke.

The lady had scarcely disappeared down the long and noble hall before Mr. Lasher appeared with young Shandy. Mr. Kearsarge stood holding open the library door.

"I hope you are well this glorious evening, and Miss Sadie also," said the trim little visitor, bowing, hat in hand.

"Tolerably well, sir. Please enter and be seated," responded the host, rather stiffly, which fact did not escape the sharp and calculating glance of the younger

man. "Mr. Lasher," continued Mr. Kearsarge, "you need not leave us. I prefer your presence."

Shandy looked up with no effort to conceal his surprise at this last remark, but said nothing. The silence was growing painful, however, when he broke in by saying:

"Eh, Mr. Kearsarge, I—eh—for some time I have desired a confidential interview with you. Father has given me an order for a special train to go down to Boston to-morrow. It is getting late. Is Miss Sadie to return to the city soon?"

"I cannot tell you, young man," abruptly broke out the old gentleman, seizing the last sentence, a question, as a pretext for growling out something.

"By the way, Mr. Kearsarge," continued the young man, somewhat with an air of one who feels that he has an advantage of you, and need not trifle longer, "I would be glad to honor that most charming young woman, your daughter—with her consent, of course—and so end your troubles."

"My troubles? What do you mean?"

"I mean that my father will do anything for me. He will stop putting the screws on; let up on you; take you back into the ring, and share the millions with you, if the families are united by this marriage. Understand?"

"My boy, see here," said Kearsarge, leaning forward and pretending to be confidential, "there are then millions in it?"

"Most certainly," responded the dullard. "We mean to control every considerable railway in New England, three trunk lines to the West, and governors, courts and legislatures enough to——"

"Stop. I know the story. I'm out, and therefore

will not steal secrets. The ring is rich, very rich. Perhaps it can afford to threaten ruin to a man like me to gratify a stripling like you, son of one of the rich chiefs. But we shall see."

"Ruin you?" said Shandy, affecting surprise. "Why, I have a letter here from my father, in which, for my sake, he proposes to prevent them from cutting off your head."

"Yes; and for your sake your father has persuaded his associates in the pool to allow him to squeeze me till I'd yield my daughter to save myself!" By this time the old man was towering upon his feet, his quivering right hand lifted high, as if he held a thunderbolt. He went on: "I wash my hands of you all. Your welcome at this house is withdrawn forever. Good-evening."

"But I hope you have considered well that we never let go a man whom we have once put in the black list."

"Do your worst. I know what the ring will wish I did not know. So does honest Tom Seacomb."

"Seacomb? He's dead; died in Brazil. We have it on good authority."

"Good-night, I say!" and the old man sent Lasher to see that he mounted speedily and rode away.

When the secretary returned he found the father and daughter sitting again in loving embrace, the October moonbeams falling across the shadowy lawn and pointing their sinister shadows in at the windows. But the twain were too happy in doing right to observe signs or think of shadows on the wall. The father looked up to say:

"Now, Mr. Lasher, we must move heaven and earth to find Seacomb."

"I should say, sir, that we have some work on hand."



"Telegraph at once to the Brazilian consul; also to our agents at Rio Janiero. Describe him and his work. Sadie, he wrote you from——"

"Boston, papa. In April. See! Read it."

She pulled Tom's letter from her bosom. As her father finished he remarked:

"You must go down to Montpelier in the morning and see his sister."

"Me? She avoids me, papa."

"That is unhappy."

And they sat pondering in the shadows.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE BLACK PLAGUE.



THE PILOT brings us terrible news, Mr. Seacomb," said the captain of the sailing ship *Pembroke*, as they lay off the coast of Brazil, six hundred miles south of the mouth of the Amazon. So far had Tom got upon his journey to the capital and the presence of Dom Pedro II.

"How so, Captain Spikes?" asked Tom, looking up from his manuscript and figures upon the cabin-table.

He was the only occupant of the saloon.

"Ah, sir, the whole coast is down with the plague. All of Ceara, and nobody knows how many districts of the interior is smitten by thousands. The poor people are rushing in droves like cattle from the uplands to the sea."

The honest skipper sat down in a chair in great perplexity of mind.

"Truly, my friend," said Tom, "that is unwelcome news. But how are you so distressed about it?"

"How, my dear sir? Why, here it is November. The sun right over our head, a plague among herds of half-civilized critters, who are swarming in the town, and we have got to lie at those docks maybe for a fortnight, discharging and reloading."

"Ah, I see. You are afraid of the plague," said Tom.

"Well, to tell the truth it ain't nice, and no doctors, no laws, no provisions. They'll eat us up like a swarm of rats, as we lie there. I've seen the small-pox here afore,

The folks jest die by thousands, and come from up-country to the coast towns in armies, all afeared and hoping for help. The black critters!"

"But you excite my sympathies," exclaimed Tom. "The imperial government, of course, interferes with help. We will add our co-operation, and so fill up the time of waiting with humane exertions for our suffering fellow-men, poor ignorants!"

"Man, you must be crazy!" exclaimed the astonished mariner. "I was thinking of dropping the pilot again, and going right on down to Rio. And I wanted you to—to stand by me with the ship-owners, and say as how we couldn't be allowed to enter port at Fortaleza 'cause of the plague."

"But are we forbidden to land?" asked Tom.

"Why, no, young feller. Bless your heart, they'd be glad to see us in at their docks, and eat us out of house and home. It's jest like starving rats, I tell you. The imperial government! They don't do nothing for the people."

"It is a plague caused by drought, famine and heat, I judge," said Tom thoughtfully.

"That's it, boy. They often have 'em. Fevers, and the devil and all; and no cool-headed man to do a thing for 'em till the plague has eaten up all it can. If that was a hospital, now. Or if any level-headed Yankee could sort o' tell them Spanish fools how to make vaccine. But it's awful! Why, if you are sick you'll die in the streets. You don't want me to stop here. Jest come up on deck."

"What are these?" asked Tom, looking over into the glassy waters of the harbor, which was dotted all over with black objects.

"Why, them's bodies. The starved, plague-dying critters jest throw themselves in by hundreds, and poison the sea. Look! Right here by the cabin door the thermometer marks 108 degrees in the shade. Come. Will you stand by me with the owners? I'll send the pilot ashore; I think he has the plague on him now by his looks."

Tom Seacomb stood thoughtfully gazing out upon the scene. A fair city, Fortaleza, its white walls glistening like a many-shaped pearl along the clouded horizon. A noble country sweeping upward into picturesque hills behind. But over all that fair landscape God's creatures crawling forth like ants to die of a terrible scourge, and no resolute man to ordain cleanliness or minister care. The sun blazed on. So had it for six long months, and not an hour of rain.

Tom Seacomb's heart was moved. He thought of home; of all his life-plans; of the near completion of his errands. A week's sail would bring him to the emperor and perhaps make his fortune. But Tom's religion was that of the Great Physician—to help men. Does the reader make out Mr. Shandy's pretentious religion? What was the shrewd old fox doing that very moment but hurt all men who stood in his way?

"Put me, at least, on shore," said Tom firmly.

"Are you a fool, Mr. Passinger?" gasped the captain.

"No, I hope not. My luggage is all ready to put in shape," and Tom dived below for a few moments. Emerging with his leather trunk on his shoulder, Tom again demanded that he should be lowered into a *jangada*, a light raft which came alongside.

The captain, in a dumb sort of way, obeyed Tom's wish. In an hour Tom looked back to see the Pem-

broke spread her sails and square away. The hero was alone upon the dock of a plague-stricken city. A never-to-be-forgotten sight met his eyes.

"You are the custom-house officer, I suppose," said Tom, accosting an official in ragged uniform, who approached him on the wharf of Fortaleza.

"Yes, Senor American. It is a city of death! Why do you come here?"

"To help you, if I can. I can speak Spanish with you," replied Tom.

And the conversation was continued in that language.

"But the senor will die here in vain," said the officer.

"Not in vain, if I can do good. What else is life for? I want to forget myself. Take me to a hotel."

"There is none free of the small-pox."

"I have had it. Lead on."

"But your skin is fair. I do not believe you."

"Have you never heard of vaccination? I was scarce sick a day, in my country."

"There is none to be so kind to us," said the man.

"I am come to be that kind."

And Tom went on to explain how, by the aid of a single cow, if they could find one undevoured, he could produce enough vaccine to supply hundreds. The boy's heart dilated with the plans of his great mission to do good. After leaving the miserable hotel, Tom said:

"Now take me to the mayor. No, let us first walk about and see what we shall see."

"There are one hundred and fifty thousand people in and about a town that ordinarily has a population of twenty-five thousand," said the official.

"What is that crowd, or procession, going down to the sea?"

"They are carrying the dead, sir, to cast into the water. It goes on all day long."

"Great Heaven, what a sight!" groaned Tom.

"The people are starving also. They eat—ah, I dare not tell you all they eat. If a child dies with no plague, but of simple starvation, why you can guess what these savage, hungry peasants do with it."

"Horrible!"

"Yes, sir. The very birds are dead from the drought and heat. The sky is brass. Oh, my God! my God!" exclaimed the helpless Brazilian.

"Why, you poor wretch, it will do no good to take on in that way. We must help ourselves if we expect God to help us. Now, let's get back to the mayor."

They picked their way along the beach where, under thatched huts, lay the squalid thousands; naked often, mere skeletons, sick in all diseases that hunger can produce. Filthy pools lay in every hollow. Hideous faces, red and purpling with the coming plague, peered out upon them. The blaze of the tropic sun was awful. Tom felt faint, but he staggered on. They ascended the marble steps of the mayor's pretentious house at last.

The servant said the mayor's wife had just died, but doubtless the mayor would see anybody who came to offer help.

The mayor soon entered, bowed down with his grief, wringing his hands. Tom introduced himself as a young American who had providentially he believed, been thrown into the midst of a great duty, and he explained what should be done as he thought. Erect hospitals, communicate with the imperial government, get money and provisions, and employ the able-bodied portion of

the vast emigrant hordes in some public work, paying them in bread.

"Ah, senor, but you are such a young man," exclaimed the helpless, inefficient ruler.

"But we Yankee boys can do a great many things if we try," answered Tom.

"I have provisions, sent by the government, down in the store-house," continued the governor. "But how shall we feed them out? They'll eat you out of house and home in a month and want more."

"Great God! You *have* provisions and not used? Give me charge. I'll employ the well ones to put up some sort of hospital before to-morrow night and pay them in bread."

It is needless to describe the efforts at persuasion with which Tom wasted precious hours before he succeeded. Enough to say that by sundown Thomas Seacomb, "the good American," "the great American," as he was soon called, was clothed with authority and held the keys of the public stores.

All the night through, all the next scorching day, he stood among gangs of willing toilers, many Brazilian merchants seconding his efforts and acting under his direction. By the midnight of the third day two vast hospitals of tents and boughs, light timber and thatch of straw, were well under way. The great store-houses began to pay the laborers in bread.

During his three nights on shore Tom had not closed his eyes in sleep. He dared not go further by way of exposure. He threw himself down in the great chair of the main office in the government building and slept.

When the brave boy awoke he felt a strange sensation of stiffness in the joints and back. His hands were hot.

His mouth parched. But he would not pause. One day, two days, three—the sick were in the hospitals at last. The paralyzed citizens of the better class were fully aroused, under an efficient leader, and were doing good work with broom, nursing, organizing relief parties and administering such medicines as each householder had. Preventive treatment by vaccination was well under way.

Tom tried to snatch a little sleep every night now. But he awoke every morning with increased fatigue and fever. His duties also increased. This young man of scarce four-and-twenty was the foremost figure in the little city. The panic-stricken populace all seemed looking to “the good American.” Within two weeks he had persuaded the authorities to plan and actually begin several public works to employ the rabble of starving rustics who continued to sweep in upon them.

One night, as the great cathedral clock struck out its midnight chimes, Tom, who lodged in the office of the government building, awoke with a death-like shiver. It seemed to him that he was all alone. He called:

“Pompo! Pompo!”

His black attendant ran to him at once in reply. But the hero stared wildly at his servant and shouted again:

“Pompo! Where are you? Come! The bells are calling to church. Is Sadie ready? The horses are at the door.”

The servant tried to reassure him without avail, and then flew out of the apartment for a physician.

“The bells are ringing. I always said I would have wedding-bells. We shall be late, Sadie!” and the voice sounded terribly resonant in the wildness of his fever. “It is your own little church, Sadie; built in memory



of your good mother on the lakeside. I tell you we will have the bells rung in old English style. The Vermonsters will wonder. Come! Our wedding-bells!"

It was true that such a chapel, beautiful and free, had been built on Mr. Kearsarge's grounds in the distant home country. In his delirium the boy seemed to himself to be there. It was the eve of the Sabbath, and in a few hours, if we could see all lands as Heaven can, we should see the young girl kneeling at prayer in her lover's behalf in those very pews so far away.

"I will go and find her!" shouted the mad sufferer, springing from his seat.

As he flew along the dim corridors of the great and sepulchral edifice in the undress of the night, he darted into the central room, a large hall under the dome. A faint light was burning in the lofty ceiling. Statues in plaster of local celebrities were ranged around the room, ghostly in the half-light. As poor Tom sprung forward suddenly, a hideous figure started out from the opposite side of the circle.

"Who are you?" cried Tom, brandishing his arms in delirious gesture.

"I am mayor of this city. Who are you?" And the wretched figure, wasted to the bone, with hollow cheeks and swaying of the bony hands, advanced upon Tom.

Just then the attendants ran in upon them. It was indeed the mayor, sick with the plague and escaped from the house. In such scenes of horror struggled and staggered Tom to his bed. With such frenzy were the poor victims tossed through the short and swift course of the scourge. And Tom might have escaped all this by selfishly "minding his own business" and leaving unfortunates to take care of themselves.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE TRAP IS SET.



R. CHARLES SHANDY sat in his spacious office in Boston one morning of those very November days in which Tom Seacomb was battling with his fever on the coast of Brazil. His son Charley sat at his side in the private room. They were in close consultation. At the point at which the reader is permitted to overhear, the elder man is saying:

"I tell you, Charley, that that young scapegrace, Seacomb, is going to cause us trouble yet."

"But, father, I supposed he was dead," said the young man in the most pitiless manner.

"Dead? Not at all. A message just came over the wires addressed to Kearsarge. It was in our company cipher, our correspondent at Bogota not knowing that he was about out of the concern. I read it. All's fair in war. It seems the Kearsarges, or somebody, are hunting the young scamp up. Charley, he has actually crossed the South American continent—stored his portfolio with surveys, mining and prospecting information, etc., of immense value. The very thing I thought of setting him at. Wonderful industry and energy has the rascal. Pattern after him, my boy, in your nobler sphere."

"Father, don't preach that low-born fellow to me!"

"Well, Charley, that's all right. But this Seacomb offered his wares to the government at Bogota. The

fools didn't know enough to negotiate with him, and he's gone to Dom Pedro II, of Brazil. What think you of that? I tell you his head is clear."

"Exactly, father, and we must crush him at the emperor's capital."

"Of course we must; for, Charley, in this fight of yours to bring Sadie's father to terms——"

"To humiliate and avenge an insult, you mean?"

"Well, put it as you please. But don't you yet love the girl, my son? You ought to marry."

"By heavens, father, I don't know! I saw her shopping to-day in Winter Street. I thought as she stepped from her pony phaeton that she was the most superb woman I ever saw."

"Well, again. In this fight, as I was saying, if Tom Seacomb should return—say with two or three hundred thousand ready money and credit and fame—to take hold with his proposed father-in-law, why, the two could fight tremendously."

"I see. We must destroy him at Rio."

"More, Charles. That boy can prove the very devil against the Union. *He has copies of all the records of his railroad up there in Vermont—copies of the secrets of that iron chest;*" and the elder man pointed straight at an iron box in the open doors of his private safe.

For some moments both men sat in silence, the younger man stroking his knees thoughtfully; his father followed his hopeful in every motion with those cold, fishy eyes of his, mainly directed at the young man's boots. At length the son said.

"Father, we don't kill men, do we?" and he laughed as he spoke.

"Not their bodies, my son," and the father smiled

broadly, for he never laughed out loud. "But we kill their business dead as a door-nail, if we want to, and then let them shift for it who dare get in our way!"

"By the way, the morning papers are full of your gift to the university."

"Yes, my boy. That keeps up the name. Give that twenty-five thousand that Rev. Dr. Sleeper asked for his missionary debt, if he calls to-day. It will sound well, and we have rough business on hand."

"Shall I go on to Washington? We need to enlist the Brazilian minister," remarked the keen schemer.

"Yes. I'll drive right down to the Brazilian consul's office here in town also. Remember our methods. Don't lay yourself liable to a suit for slander. In a quiet way give the imperial representative to understand that Seacomb is a scoundrel, plotting to advance the United States of Colombia at the expense of Brazil; has stolen all of his information, exploring without license, etc. Convey the impression that if we form a telegraph company, or a railway company up the Amazon, we expect to give shares for nothing to those who favor us, etc. You know how the great ring works. I'll trust you. Hurry to the train."

Not to wear out the reader's patience, in this way, with many days of subtle toil, running hither and thither of secret agents, of which the great railway ring had hundreds in its employ, from private detectives up to senators and cabinet ministers, the work was being pushed to ruin the mere youth who had some of their damning secrets in his possession, and who had thus far outwitted the giant monopoly in one of its pet schemes.

Some time was consumed of course in drawing the vast net which was to snare the fish. It had come now

to be December. The city was in the midst of its winter gayety. But whether men and women danced or wept the great monopoly ground its daily grist of smaller men, and took its heavy toll. The Shandys and the Kearsarges met from time to time in social circles, but it was observed that Sadie and her father went out but little this season, and that the father seemed much broken by cares. Indeed it begun to be whispered that he was in decided financial trouble—might fail, for that matter, any day, and the great house on Beacon Street be sold.

“What a pity!” some said. Other some said, after the world’s manner: “Ought to have known better than to have quarreled with the ring. They’ll kill any man they please.”

In the office of the Shandys again, a December’s day. The reader may conceal himself behind one of the screens and listen. A clerk brings in a card. The elder Shandy, who is alone, looks up, reads the card, a stare of surprise stealing over his hard features as he answers:

“Mr. Kearsarge! Well, well, show him in, Skittles.”

Mr. Kearsarge enters, not without evident embarrassment in the air and countenance of the handsome old gentleman. Mr. Shandy, smooth as oil and wary as a fox, opens the conversation.

“Mr. Kearsarge, I’m surprised to see you. We have not met in a business way lately.”

“No, Shandy,” answered the visitor, with the downright speech and tone of one who felt himself as much morally superior as he was in years. “I come to-day to make a straight out-and-out appeal to your manliness and love of fair play.”

"It is to be hoped not in vain," answered the ring-master, his little eyes fixed on the carpet at his visitor's feet.

"It is not for myself, Shandy. . You have got me under. Thank Heaven, I'm not beggared; but you have crippled me for life. I can live, however——"

"Excuse me, sir, business is business. If the great union, in which you know there are many abler men than I, saw fit to dispense with you, why I might greatly regret it; but what could I do? My son Charley, however, who is becoming of great influence among us, could even now, if you propose, extricate——"

"Shandy, hold up. I see the trick; I know you all. I came here to-day, with some sense of humiliation—except that it is never humiliating to go on mercy's errands—to ask you to let up on Tom Seacomb. For two months I have done my best to help him win his rights against you. I confess that, and as frankly confess my failure. You fellows have the Brazilian government pledged against him."

"Why, the young man from Vermont? Where is he?"

"You know, Shandy, where he is, or was last heard of. You have tracked him to his ship, bound from Aspinwall for Rio. You know that he seems not yet to have arrived, unaccountably. But I know that you have so pulled the wires that, if the boy is not gone to the bottom of the sea, when he does step foot on shore at Rio Janeiro he can do nothing; is under suspicion at once as a lawless adventurer; is actraily liable to arrest, to say nothing of the hopelessness of a profitable sale for his really valuable surveys."

"Sir, you—you are able to give me information," said

Shandy, his angular mouth straightened out into a smile that was half-sneer.

"Pardon me, no. I have found your agents everywhere ahead of me. My daughter and I, with the boy's friend, Ketrige, have worked hard, but you are getting to be all-powerful. Now, Shandy, in God's name, whom you worship and who is Seacomb's God as yours, give the boy a chance. Call off your dogs."

"Sir!" hissed the quiet millionaire, who never allowed himself to get greatly excited. "Be more careful of your terms. Dogs! The word is unbearable."

"Well, I'm here to succeed. I don't want to anger you. I'll take back the obnoxious expression. But it seems to be in the power of your lips to blast that young life forever or to save it. Why not say now that one word that shall save it? That's all I have to say."

"But, my dear old partner, is this indeed an errand of pure philanthropy? Have you no personal interests to serve in the young man's prosperous return?" The words were spoken in a biting, quiet way.

"For my child, yes, I have an interest to serve—her happiness. You have a child whom you love. A parent need not apologize to another parent for a desire to make his child happy."

"True enough. But have you no other interests which the return of this young chap can forward?"

"Heaven help me to be calm! Why, man, do you suppose I would come here to ask a merciful deed of you and then make use of it in a commercial contest against you? I know—as you know—what could be proved against you by the mouth of that young man. I know, as you know, that he has duplicate records which you do not care to have see the light. But never,

with my consent, shall he return by your kindness and turn upon you to harm you."

"That is all very noble, old friend, providing you can answer for what a high-spirited young scamp——"

"Now, now. You are using words hard to hear."

"Very well. The young gentleman, then. But it is no matter. You must not go out of this office with the false impression that we fear any revelations he or you can make. We enjoy the esteem of the nation. Heaven defends men who give away the money that we do every year." And the canting hypocrite rubbed his thin hands in unctious calmness.

"We will not discuss Heaven's deeds. Will you do this deed? Will you cable to your agents about the Brazilian emperor that you are reconciled to Seacomb, if he ever turns up?"

"No. Are you answered?"

The old man sprung to his feet. It was Mr. Kearsarge's misfortune that he was too excitable. But perhaps the reader can excuse him now. Pausing with his hand upon the door-knob, lifting the other which carried his hat, he said:

"Then, Charles Shandy, I say that you would kill if you lived in the middle ages. It is in your heart now. If it is in your heart, it is before God as if your hand was red with the deed. Remember Cain!"

Hardly had the visitor departed before young Charles stepped in from a communicating office. His father regarded him for a moment in silence. Then both men smiled. It was the habit of neither of them ever to laugh aloud.

"It works, father. It works! The coil tightens. I never saw the like. Perfect success! Seacomb cannot



be an hour in Rio but his every movement will be known by our agents. Indeed, we can arrest him and I think frighten him into leaving the country. The lawyers say we have hardly a case for imprisonment. You see, any traveler has a right to go up the Amazon if he will. Our point is a good one, however, about trying to sell his information to the Bogota government."

"Shall we know if he arrives?" asked the father.

"Yes, it is all arranged that we shall be cabled by way of Europe at once."

"All right, my child. Now try not to feel too much elated over all this. Try not to entertain vengeful thoughts. We are but instruments in the hands of Providence, understand? We simply punish the—the wicked—see? We are providentially called to be very rich and powerful men; we must educate and control our age. Why, this ring—as they call our great railroad combination—is for the blessing of the people, the masses, you know. We regulate competition and provide cheap fares, and organize vast connections across the country which would be impossible without change of cars if——"

"Father, excuse me; we heard all that before. You do like to lecture and preach, you dear old rogue. By the way, I made that subscription for the heathen today."

And they both smiled the calm Shandy smile as they fell to their tasks at separate desks calculating millions.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.



UT TOM SEACOMB was not dead—far from it. The brave fellow's struggle with the Ceara plague can be more easily imagined than described. Suffice it to say that as soon as it became known that the "good American" had been stricken, it seemed as if the whole city was moved in his behalf. Who but was indebted to him? It was he who, under God, had saved their town from destruction. With warm, impulsive southern generosity, the rich and the poor contended together for his comfort. As he could not be removed from the government building, his office was converted into a chamber of luxury. Fair women of the aristocratic class came to serve him. Proud grandees watched at his bedside. The cathedral and lesser churches resounded with prayers for his recovery.

And he did recover. When first he was able to ride out, his course along the streets was as the procession of a conqueror. Conqueror he was, indeed, of hearts. A victor, not by lives wasted in battle, but thousands of poor lives saved by his sanitary care and Yankee enterprise. His pale, handsome features, yet chiseled by the wasting fever into a nobility of tender beauty, beamed upon the people.

And when he departed, to pursue again his journey, it was as empty-handed as he came. But the fame of his disinterested kindness flew on before, and with and

after him to the Imperial city. The government deputy made haste, in lengthy reports, to set before the emperor and the distant congress the story of his eminent services. Perhaps we shall find that man never loses anything by obeying the impulses of a generous heart. Perhaps we shall find that God does not forget deeds of self-sacrifice.

It was midwinter in Rio Janeiro. The glorious climate was in the beauty of its favored season. Tom stepped on shore confidently, full of hope, and with no suspicion of the net that had been spread for his feet. He had money enough to proceed like a gentleman of means to his hotel in a carriage. He sent at once for a tailor, and much, indeed, did he need one after those long months in the wilderness. As he stood the next morning upon the steps of the hotel, with the distinguished air of a genuine gentleman, he was accosted by an American, apparently a commercial traveler, with:

"From New York, I take it. Pleasant to meet a fellow-countryman in these parts."

"Yes. Glad to know you, sir. My name is Seacomb, from Vermont," replied Tom in the most unsuspecting way of a heart without guile.

The stranger lifted his hat. As if it were a signal, you might have observed another man leaning against the fountain coping in the plaza lift his hat in response and hurry away. If you had followed this second man, you would have seen him go directly to the telegraph office and cable a dispatch to Boston by way of Europe. Then he might have been traced to the police headquarters, where he entered into conversation with the chief detective. Then, in turn, various persons, presumably detectives, appeared and departed in various directions.

Meanwhile Tom sat conversing carelessly with his newly-made acquaintance on the veranda of the hotel.

"Can you tell me the way to the United States Consul's office?" inquired Seacomb.

The stranger could, in fact would walk with him to the door; and Tom, honest fellow, explained that he had important business with the government, though not explaining what it was. He afterward remembered that the stranger seemed very familiar with the American Consul, and was about to remain seated in that official's apartments while Tom made known his errand, had not the latter requested that they be alone. Tom hoped that they should meet again at the hotel, and was obliged for the escort.

"Mr. Hawkes," began Tom, "I am a Vermont boy. I have been spending some time in Northern Brazil, and have important surveys, particularly relating to the Amazon valley and the Andes region, which I wish to dispose of to the imperial government. I have complete data for the construction of a telegraph line across the continent. Also valuable material with reference to railroad building over the mountains."

"Seacomb," answered the consul with a wink in his sharp eyes, "I advise you not to pursue the matter further. Bigger men than you are snatching at the same prize."

"Yes, sir; you do not surprise me. But competition is honorable, is it not?"

"I'll not say anything more to you. My mouth is shut," was the answer.

"Do you mean that you will not introduce me, an American citizen, to the Minister of the Interior, Fernandino? I tell you, Mr. Hawkes, that I have letters

of introduction from one of the provinces of the coast that will serve me without you, then. It seemed to me an advantage and courteous, however, to have the countenance of the American representative. Perhaps you would prefer that I seek the United States Minister. I think I see how the wind blows, Hawkes. Be careful. The right will prevail. I wish you good-morning."

"Not so fast, young man. I wish you to stay here," replied the official in a severe tone.

"What! That is cool. Stand aside from that door," said Tom, straightening himself up as the consul sprung from his chair and put his hand upon the door-knob.

"Young chap, you are my prisoner if I please to make you so. Listen to reason. Take the outgoing steamer for Europe quietly."

"Take your hand off that lock, sir, and sit down again, or I'll throw you out of the way!" The splendid form of Tom Seacomb towered like a Hercules above the little Hawkes, and his handsome face paled with suppressed and righteous anger. He stepped forward. Hawkes drew back from the door.

"Now sit down, and like two freemen together under the Stars and Stripes that fly over your office, tell me the indictment against me. Read me the order for my arrest, if you have such a thing."

"My fine fellow," began Hawkes in a playful manner, "do not get on your dignity and call for papers——"

"Because you have none," put in Tom. "Boy I may be in comparison with your years, but I know my rights and can defend them. I snap my fingers at you and Shandy."

"Shandy!" in tone of mock surprise. "Ah, Seacomb, if it were Shandy alone, but it is not. A great

many things have been going on since you were in a civilized community. Why, a big company has been formed to build these very telegraph and railway lines you have surveyed. And lots of these high officials are in with Shandy. He's got 'em all with him."

"All right. But I'm on the ground first. I'll go straight to the Emperor Dom Pedro II," said the undaunted fellow.

"Are you crazy? I'll imprison you!" fairly yelled Hawkes.

"Ah, you too are in the ring, then. Look, Hawkes, what you do to an American citizen. You must answer at Washington. I again wish you good-evening. I see I must work fast."

Tom was almost at the door when it opened to admit to his surprise the hotel stranger of the morning and two powerful men in the uniform of the city police. Tom glared at them in speechless indignation.

"Now, my grand chap," said Hawkes, with exasperating coolness, "do not tear yourself away from us. Be seated. We will send right up to the hotel and get your baggage. You can get the European steamer yet. She sails at six o'clock. It is not yet noon. Will you go?"

Tom made no reply.

"Seacomb," began the hotel stranger, "I am employed by some of the foremost politicians of this capital. I presume Mr. Hawkes has left me nothing to say but to corroborate him. Dom Pedro, indeed! You! Why, you couldn't get up the palace steps. Now clear out. Don't compel us to make a noise."

"You ring of scoundrels!" cried Tom, confronting the four men. "I know you and your Yankee masters. I am not to be frightened out of this city. You shall

have all the noise and publicity one injured freeman can make, Heaven helping the innocent. Four men can overpower one, but now you must do it or produce legal papers for my arrest."

No one moved. Tom sprung like a tiger upon the deceiver of the hotel and hurled him like a log against the nearest of the policemen. With another push he sent the grinning Hawkes into his arm-chair. But the door was locked. The two police were about to draw revolvers upon an unarmed man when Hawkes shouted:

"Don't shoot, for God's sake! We could never answer for his blood."

"No, I thought not, you cowards!" yelled Tom. "Nature's weapons are enough for an innocent man. Open this door, or I'll tear it down!"

And the young athlete grasped the frail structure by some projecting ornaments.

Just then there was a knock from the outside. One of the police, who happened to be so standing that he could look through the window into the street, exclaimed, in Spanish:

"Vera Cruze! It is the escort of the emperor!"

There had been a rattle of wheels and a clatter of hoofs as the imperial carriage swept up to the door of the consulate. A score of mounted guards drew about the royal conveyance as it halted, their sabers ringing against bright trappings. The wide street was full of idle lookers-on at a distance, and shop-keepers and citizens appeared respectfully at their doors and windows.

So great had been the excitement within the consulate that the arrival of his majesty had not been noticed. The orderly now renewed his knock, somewhat impatiently, at the door which should have been respectfully

flung open in anticipation of any summons. It was almost ludicrous in Tom's eyes to watch the transformation instantly wrought upon the other occupants of the room. The obsequious police stood like martinets, with clubs at shoulder-arms, blinking with awe. The nameless detective picked himself up from the floor with what grace he could. The man Hawkes rolled himself out of his chair, fairly scrambling toward the door, tugging away at his ruffled attire as he went, as if suddenly aware that he represented the dignity of a great nation. As for Tom, he stood motionless with surprise, awaiting events with the kindlings of a great hope which he hardly dare name to himself.

"His majesty, Dom Pedro II, inquires at the American consulate for the gentleman just arrived, the Honorable Thomas Seacomb, scientist, explorer and philanthropist."

Thus rattled off the orderly his message.

"Great Heavens? what does it mean, Seacomb," stammered Hawkes. "Come along with me, quick!" and the consul fairly pulled Tom out after him through the opening ranks of the cavalcade who stood with presented sabers in honor of the emperor's guest.

Bowing formally at the carriage-steps, Hawkes said:

"Your majesty, my honored countryman, Mr. Thomas Seacomb, scientist, explorer, philanthropist."

A handsome, white-bearded gentleman with uncovered head leaned forward with extended hand, scarce noticing poor Hawkes, but grasping Tom's brown palm, saying:

"Honor us with your company. The steamer that brought you yesterday brought the official story of your most Christian service to our poor, starving, plague-cursed people in Ceara. Princes are honored in honor-



ing the heroes of Christian sacrifice. We at once drove in person to your hotel and traced you hither."

In a dazed, dreamy diffidence Tom got into the carriage, scarce knowing what to say or do. He cannot to this day recall just how he shaped his reply, and he feels sure that if the emperor had introduced himself by any other topic he might possibly have found his tongue to reply.

The sleek liveries resumed their places. The splendid horses were given rein and sprung forward. The cavalcade clattered proudly after with plumed helmets dancing in the air and the brilliant sunlight glancing from steel and gold. Tom Seacomb, the poor-house boy of a few years ago, was gone to be the guest of an emperor.

As they swept proudly on up the street and into the grandest square in the world, Camps du Acclamacao, Tom sat with head uncovered, following the example of his majesty; and the people wondered at the noble young stranger. Who might he be? While many remarked upon the noble mien of some supposed foreign prince. The prince was Tom Seacomb, from a country where all are princely who do princely deeds.

Past theater, cathedral, museum—past the edifice of the Brazilian congress—past gardens with spraying fountains, rare flowers and grand tropic trees that cast their grateful shade upon them, as also over the group of laughing children and citizens in holiday attire—on through the beautiful park—on through the kindly greetings of the people. Finally, with food for delightful memories stored for many a year, Tom was ushered through the palace gates and alighted to be led along marble halls.

It needs not to describe Tom's entertainment—how in

this august company he visited the public institutions of the fair southern capital; how the newspapers, the very next day, contained glowing accounts of the "illustrious young American who had periled his life for the scourged peasantry of the regions of the drought," how noble personages called to do honor to one whom royalty would honor and all true patriots and good men felt to be deserving. For one whole week Tom was employed with nothing but a succession of complimentary attentions of the highest order. He could not protest; he could only try meekly to receive.

At last, one day, in conversation with the emperor, Tom made bold to say:

"Your majesty, however much I am gratified by these illustrious attentions, I feel that you will allow me to protest that I simply tried to act out my belief in the Christian religion——"

"No doubt of it, Mr. Seacomb, no doubt of it!" said the emperor with great fervor.

"And now, I am a young business man; I surely did not make known my charitable deeds to you; I do not wish to trade upon religious acts. I have great embarrassment in presenting certain business schemes which brought me hither," continued Tom.

"Not at all," responded Dom Pedro. "Your works also are known. I am prepared to submit your papers to a committee of congress. My prime minister will make you a pecuniary proposition at once."

For two days Tom was busy with these officials. At the end of that time the minister offered Tom Seacomb two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the entire and sole possession of all his manuscripts, figures, specimens and plans. Tom closed with the offer at once.

As if this was not enough, the congress voted the young man a resolution of thanks "for his many and distinguished services to Brazil; but most especially recognizing in him a pattern of true Christian philanthropy," a gold medal was ordered to be struck commemorating his deeds in Ceara.

But before Tom could take ship for home, the reader may be sure that these events had been telegraphed and written to Boston. Indeed, at the very hour of his departure from Consul Hawkes' office the telegraph flashed this message to greet the Boston monopolists the next morning:

*"To Chas. Shandy, No. — State Street, Boston, U. S. A.:*

*"Devil's to pay. Seacomb arrived and received by emperor himself. What next?"*

*"HAWKES, U. S. Consul at Rio Janeiro.*

*"December 31, 18—."*

The arrival of that dispatch about noon the next day was like the bursting of a bomb-shell in the proud fortress of the railroad ring. The next few days were filled with similar sensations, as message after message told of Tom's brilliant reception at the distant capital. The shrewd schemers were set buzzing.

Above all things these men feared were telegrams from Tom himself to his friends. But poor Tom knew nothing of the recent change of feeling toward him in Mr. Kearsarge's heart. Nor had he heard a word of Sædie in these long months. The brief dispatch carried to Charley Ketridge for his parents and sister the ring suppressed at the office, for money could hire anything.

But all this did not prevent Tom's steamer plowing the sea bravely on her way for New York.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### WHO WERE CAUGHT.



HOW IS it, Charley?"

"Mr. Kearsarge's card. Shall he be shown up?"

It was a family party in Tom Seacomb's parlors, at the Tremont House, in Boston. Our young friend was again in his native land. He had arrived from New York but a few hours before, off ship scarce eight-and-forty hours. A month before Charley Ketridge, his old friend, brought Tom's sister Bessie, now Charley's bride, with the aged couple, her parents, to Boston, in hopes of soon arranging this same family reunion. They now hung about the brave adventurer—the successful, rich, and what is better the pure-hearted son and brother—with many a caress and many a fond congratulation. For two hours tongues had run, questions and answers had flown faster than any narrative could record. The splendid comforts of honestly-earned wealth Tom did not deny himself. The best apartments at the best hotel of the city, gentlemanly dress, and the attendance of ready servants, yet no ostentation.

"I say, Tom, shall I have Mr. Kearsarge shown up?" repeated Charley Ketridge.

Tom looked up dubiously, not knowing what to answer, when Bessie, his sister, broke in with:

"Why, Tom, don't you know? Sadie and her father are as true as steel. You dear old fellow, that precious girl has been breaking her heart for you. Her father

has worked with us in trying to find you, as if you were his only son!"

And in the swift speech of a loving woman, too eager to tell good news, the narrative of months of history was rattled off in Tom's thirsty ears.

The weary-hearted lover sprung to his feet with uncontrollable emotion. His stalwart form seemed to tremble as he caught Charley Ketridge by the hand, and swung his petite sister fairly off her dancing feet as he strode to the door. He called to the servant:

"Send the gentleman up instantly. Stop, I will go down with you."

But Mr. Kearsarge had followed his card and was pacing the hall. The two men met. They clasped hands, the young and the old. They spoke no word as they looked into each other's faces, and then walked back to Tom's room. After that meeting only death ever parted them.

As the two re-entered the room and cordial greetings were once more in full tide, Mr. Kearsarge suddenly turned to Tom and said:

"My boy, there is another friend of yours under this roof who should be in this room."

"Under this roof?" exclaimed Tom promptly. "Why, I was about to propose that you escort me to your Beacon Street residence to meet her."

"Ah, Tom! you don't know the shameful story," warmly interposed Bessie Ketridge. "Those bad men, the Shandys and the others, have almost ruined poor Mr. Kearsarge."

"I have been seriously crippled in a fight just closing with Shandy and the ring. My city residence—well, old Lakeside, in Vermont, is safe, and I can yet live well in

this hotel. We will talk business by and by. Shall I——”

“No,” said Tom, “you shall not bring her to me, but conduct me to your parlors. Come.”

Within Mr. Kearsarge’s parlors, perhaps, it is improper that we intrude. The strong young man stepped forward and wound the radiant Sadie in his embrace. The father, withdrawing to the window, thought as he turned away that he had never seen a nobler match of man and mate than they. And he stood long and patiently at the window, looking at the thousand men and women passing in the busy street, wondering if among those thousands there were happier twain than those whose low conversation he could hear murmuring behind him. The proud father thought of all the dozen years that had passed since he first saw Tom, a poor-house lad, whom his little daughter was teaching to read in the rural school-house at the forks of the road; thought of his own senseless opposition to the boy; of the boy’s strong will to succeed in life, and now of that brilliant success with which the career of few elderly men could compare; thought of the recent dark days now over, of his child’s loving patience, sorrow and present happiness. He thought of his own fast flying years, which must soon be numbered, and thanked Heaven that his only child should not be left defenseless, but ever with this manly and true heart at her side. At length his daughter said:

“Papa, come, please.”

He approached and stood over them, seated before him.

“Papa, we do not want to—to risk more partings. Tom wishes you to say it, however, in his hearing, that—that it is all right.”

She paused, not having spoken in form of words quite all her meaning. But the heart of the only parent guessed the rest, and he said:

“Any time you please, my children.”

And he kissed the girl as he bent to put her hand in Tom’s.

“Let it be in the dear home at Lakeside, papa, where we have been the happiest, where mamma was with us last, where I first found Tom. Can we not go soon to Vermont? The spring days are near.”

“Yes, dear. As soon as we can,” he answered hesitatingly.

“Cannot we start this day week? It will take time to put the house in order.”

“Yes,” slowly responded the father, a cloud creeping over his happy face. “But—there is something in the business line that will detain me—and Tom, too, I fear. You don’t know what the next move of our foes is to be, do you?”

Scarcely had Mr. Kearsarge finished speaking when a servant appeared bearing a letter upon a silver tray, and saying apologetically:

“Please, Mr. Seacomb, the man who brought it said as how it was more important than anything else, and I would go with it at once. So I follered yer here.”

A pretentious envelope, bearing a colored crest upon its face. Tom tore it open impatiently, and read:

*“Office of the Union Railway Company of North America.*

*“No. — STATE ST., BOSTON, March 20th.*

*“To Mr. Thomas Seacomb:*

*“DEAR SIR—By calling at our offices at two o’clock this P. M., you will be granted an interview. We think there are many reasons why you will be prompt to avail*

yourself of this appointment. Hoping for your health, etc., etc., we remain, yours, etc.,  
[*"Dictated Letter."*] "CHAS. SHANDY & SON."

The crimson flushed into Tom's fine face. His dark eyes flashed. He quickly stepped to recall the messenger, saying:

"Send up the bearer of this note immediately, if he is not gone."

"How savage you look, Tom," said Sadie, clinging to his arm in graceful playfulness. "Tell me everything that troubles you now."

"Why, yes," he answered, and then read the letter aloud to both of them.

"What do you think of that for impudence, Charley?" for Charley Ketridge had just entered the room to know what the message meant.

"Shandy has grown too conceited for decency since he grew so rich and powerful," remarked Mr. Kearsarge. "Why, he thinks you'll be only too glad to run to the king's beck and nod. He wants to compromise with you, now that he knows you to be powerful."

"And he knows that I have records of that railway business that may send his precious son to prison," added Tom vehemently.

The messenger now entered. It was one of the confidential clerks from Shandy's office.

"Here, my man," said Tom. The clerk, who was accustomed to see men almost bow down with deference to him as the bearer of papers from the great house of Shandy & Son, looked up in perfect astonishment at the off-hand carelessness of the free American citizen. Tom continued: "Take that back to your employers!" handing the note,



"Eh, sir?" stammered the man. "That is the same note which I brought you."

"Yes. I have penciled my answer on the back of it." Then, turning to his friends, he explained: "I have written that, if Shandy & Son, or any of the ring, want to see me, they can find me here—that I presume there are reasons why they will make haste to do so."

Charley Ketridge laughed aloud with delight. Mr. Kearsarge rubbed his hands and said that was good. The clerk, fairly pale with wonder over such audacity as he never saw millionaires and governors display, bowed and departed.

"You see, Sadie," explained Tom, "we do not consider those men entitled to even gentlemanly treatment. Your father and I hope to prove that they are no better than common felons, except that they have stolen millions instead of pocket-books. Now I think we gentlemen must leave you ladies to yourselves for a while, for be sure that Shandy & Son will come here before night."

"Your papers and the box are in your rooms," said Charley. "Let us go there while the family come in."

Mr. Kearsarge dispatched a messenger for his attorney, and the four gentlemen were soon in the depths of consultation in Tom's parlor.

It was not long before Tom threw out upon the table copies of his records, made but three months before the scene with the elder Shandy.

The reader will recall that Tom was then cashier and secretary of the railroad running across the State of Vermont, which he himself had been more largely instrumental in building than any other one man.

"Tell me just what you expect to prove in court, Mr. Seacomb," said Mr. Kearsarge's lawyer.

"This," was the reply, as the clear-headed young man bent with tracing forefinger over the papers, "that on the first of April last year that road had \$10,000,000 capital stock. Add also \$3,000,000 bonds issued for borrowed money, first mortgage, seven per cent., for completing and equipping.

24 locomotives, worth.....	\$240,000
450 cars of all sorts, worth.....	90,000

---

Total value of road, etc.....\$13,330,000

"Now, we all know that on the fifteenth of April the road was in the hands of Shandy & Son, by his getting control of barely a majority of the stock. It is also a matter of everybody's knowledge that on the first of May following, Shandy, having complete control of the books, represents the road as bankrupt, indebted to him for nearly two millions of borrowed money, with only eight locomotives—not enough to operate the road—and only eighty-five miserable cars of all sorts. Of course he gets a decree of court in bankruptcy, sells out the road to the ring and us poor stockholders whistle for our money."

"Zounds!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Why, the fellow has sworn falsely, embezzled, stolen and I know not what. How could any court have looked calmly on?"

"True. But you see he owns the very courts," answered Tom. "Why did not the court summon me, a former financial official in the same road? Why did not the court send for Mr. Black and the master mechanic, asking what had become of those missing cars and engines? The rolling-stock was scattered all over the country, names changed, numbers changed, I can prove

that by Mr. Ketridge here and Mr. Kearsarge, who have been looking the property up."

"Mr. Kearsarge," said the lawyer, "this corresponds with your other story of ring methods. Ah, sir," he added with a sly wink, "as you were a member of that virtuous ring for a few months, all that saves you is——"

"That I backed out and that Shandy got mad with me. I actually sold the controlling share, or nearly the controlling share, to the Shandys in Tom's own road. Heaven forgive me." And the old man got to his feet and paced the room.

"Very well, now," said the lawyer. "We make no terms with them, I believe?"

"Yes," replied Tom, "these terms. All proceedings against Mr. Kearsarge to be stopped; his quarries to be admitted to the common freight rates; the Cross-State road to be surrendered and the man who falsified those books to be put in prison. And, I believe, here he is now," said Tom, who also had risen and was pacing the floor, as he paused in his walk, looking down into Tremont Street. There stood Shandy's elegant sleigh before the hotel, and father and son were being assisted out by the liveried footman.

As the two men entered Thomas Seacomb's parlors they were a study. The elder Shandy could not quite succeed in laying aside the arrogant, self-confident airs which had grown upon him with his prosperity. Yet he succeeded to realize the necessity of making a good impression and placating the resolute man whom he was now facing. The son wore a look of hard, unyielding obstinacy; his habitual selfishness was too dull and blind to see that he must humble himself before this generous and high-minded young adversary. He looked upon

Tom, moreover, with all the intense hatred of a jealous and rejected lover. The father at once made the advances of a gentleman. The son could not bring his mean little spirit even to the decencies of courteous greetings.

"Mr. Seacomb, I wish you a happy return to your native land," said the elder Shandy, looking down about at Tom's knees.

"Mr. Shandy," responded Tom, "it will not pay to trifle with fine words. We are prepared to meet you in court and——"

"Oh, Seacomb, I trust that is unnecessary. You have proved yourself a mighty smart boy. Now I guess we can fix it to let you into the Union—I guess so. I think I can fix it. Then you are one of us and old scores are all squared."

"Father, how you humble yourself!" bitterly exclaimed young Charles Shandy.

"Keep still, my son, keep still," was the reply in a tone of fussy impatience.

"Shandy," said Tom, "do not trouble your happy family with arranging for my fortunes. I will never enter a wicked ring like that which you largely control!"

"Are you a fool?" shouted the little son. "You are the first man who ever declined the honor."

Tom paid no attention to the fellow, but continued addressing the father:

"We have very simple terms. You must release all your unjust claims on Mr. Kearsarge and open his marble-quarries. You must cancel all pretended sales, conveyances, or whatever be the form of bargain between you and the ring, of my old railroad. In short, take it out of the pool and reinvest us stockholders.

You own some of the stock. That I will buy if you want to sell; but, of course, I cannot demand that. What I do demand is the release of the road from your great monopoly."

"Impossible!"

"Not so. Look at these exhibits."

Tom shoved the papers, previously herein briefly referred to, under Shandy's eye upon the table.

The fraud-conspirator, thief of millions of poor men's money, of which this one road was but one example now brought to light, grew ashen-pale as, with both hands braced upon the table, he leaned forward and studied those papers for a few moments.

"Seacomb, it is too hard. It is not the forfeit of money, but it is the disgrace of failure before the board of directors of the Union. It ruins my power of leadership. Yes, it knocks a stone out of our arch which may in time tumble it all down."

"Right is right, sir. You yet have millions, though I expect to live to see you lose them by just such justice as we mete out."

"I'll die first!" and the foolish man in his desperation actually grasped the papers to destroy the proof against him.

Tom Seacomb caught his two crafty, dishonest hands in an instant, encircling both Shandy's wrists in the iron grip of his one hand. He forced the old hypocrite into a chair.

"Now, sir, if you were not an old man—but I'll not punish you."

Tom released him.

"I'm a young man!" screamed the son, dancing forward.

"Yes, you false scoundrel!" replied Tom, turning full his manly form to confront the little fellow. "And you must go to prison. Do you hear? You are a forger."

It is impossible to describe the scene that followed. The aristocratic, haughty Shandy, senior, wringing his claw-like hands that had throttled many a struggling business firm, now clasping those hard hands and pleading with Tom. He would promise anything—all that Tom asked. He actually signed, then and there, the initiatory papers for Tom's righting and Mr. Kearsarge's.

"But don't disgrace us in the person of my son. Why, he's a graduate of college, a member of the St. Dolphin Club and a worker in the church. Prison!"

"You should have thought of all this when you were breaking the laws. I do not disgrace you nor your son. He has done all that for himself. I only bring it to light. I cannot compound felony. The laws must take their course. Sir, there is a thousand other men who will proceed against him as these facts come out if I do not."

It is needless to follow the thieves of millions further. In a short, sharp trial the work was done. One year from the day on which Tom had sailed away from America, thrown to the dogs as it was supposed to gratify this only son of a rich monopolist, society was all agog with the story of his trial, condemnation and imprisonment. To be sure it was only for three years, but the disgrace was the same, the humiliation as complete.

"Be sure your sin will find you out," for "though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished."

All rings and monopolies will find it so.

And Tom's prophecy is gradually proving true. The ill-gotten millions of the great house of Shandy & Son are the perpetual mark for litigation on the part of wronged victims all over the country, and success is attending the right. Shandy was heard not long since to exclaim, as he lost another of a long series of suits in court, taking from him many thousands of his extorted wealth:

“It is a dog's life I lead in my old age, with my hand against every man and every man's hand against me.”

## CHAPTER XXX.

### WEALTH, HAPPINESS AND HONOR.



IN THE lengthening days of late May, when the fond old State of Vermont is in its most charming attire, the spacious grounds at Lakeside were at last in complete readiness. It was a wedding festival such as the region had never known. The little memorial church, its gray stones overrun with Wistaria in bloom, never held so august a company. The desk from which Sadie had first taught Tom his letters, in the old red school-house, bearing even the marks of his jackknife, was loaded with rarest flowers, and stood in the chancel holding up the open book which ever had been the rule of Tom's life. It was opened to this passage from Proverbs III (to which a book-mark of solid silver from the top of the Andes pointed):

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.”

The guests were profuse in presents. The Emperor Dom Pedro II of Brazil, sent, by his minister, a miniature *bas relief* of the harbor and town of *Fortaleza*, where Tom's heroic deeds were done which forever endeared him to the hearts of all Brazilians. It was in solid silver, richly engraved with the story of Tom's heroism. It was accompanied with an elegant set of plate, silver and gold; and Brazilian diamonds of the first water and great value for the beautiful, the noble, the beloved of such a man.



All Tom's old school friends were there. The first men in the commonwealth were there. Even old Greggs, the keeper of Acton poor-house, once Tom's bitterest foe, whom he had to get pardoned out of prison, was there, full of friendship, and the most devoted attachment to "his Tom."

"My boy," said Sadie's father as they were talking of the presents, "there is one that you know nothing about. I am commissioned to make the presentation, and beg its prompt acceptance in the name of the board. You are elected president of the railroad. I call that pretty good for a young man of your years. Here is the certificate."

Of course Tom protested. Of course Sadie, all in white satin and orange flowers, stopped his lips with her pretty hands, and laughed and caressed him in a way that is not to be described.

"For now," said she, "we shall always live at dear Lakeside, and not go back to dreadful Boston."

"Save when you take your private car, and run down to do your shopping, eh?" Tom said, and protested no more.

"You are already one of the foremost young citizens of this State," said Mr. Kearsarge, "and before long we will make you governor, my son."

"My son! Hear him," gleefully laughed the happy young bride. And the calls of the gay company drew them forth from their seclusion to lead on the festivities. Some weeks later, after the happy couple had returned from their wedding journey and Tom had settled down to hard work in his new office, he said, one morning:

"Sadie, I suppose sister Bessie must go back to Boston and her Charley. Father and mother think they

can keep house a little longer down at the Montpelier mansion; it seems home to them, and is near us. I have arranged housekeeper and servants for them, and put the old place in repair. Now come down and see, my lady, how you may send your guests home."

At the foot of the grounds, in a secluded vale of maples, workmen had been busy for days. Thither they all walked.

"What, Tom! a new building?" exclaimed Sadie.

"Yes, two of them. That further one is for the locomotive and your cars. This is your own private depot. It is not very large, but it is quite sufficient for my lady and guests. You see, it is light, airy. Swiss chalet in style, and as ornamental as a summer-house in the grounds."

"And you never told me what all the workmen were doing out here," pouted the fair girl, in mock reproof. "But there is the train."

"Yes," answered Tom. "We have a switch from the main line, a mile below. See? That is old Breeze. Isn't she painted and adorned beyond recognition?"

"Beautiful machine, my son," said old Mr. Seacomb. "But you do not own a whole locomotive, do you, Thomas?"

"Yes, sir. I hope I am part owner in a great many. But this one I own entire. Bought and paid for. Isn't she a beauty?"

And Tom patted her great wheels as if they were the limbs of a living creature.

"Good-morning, Pete," continued he, saluting the same honest Larkin, who sat in the cab. "My dear," addressing Sadie, "this is your own private coachman, whenever you wish to travel by steam."

"Except when you are roaming about with him," she replied.

"In which case you can accompany me, and keep house, too, if you wish," her husband answered, leading the way to the two cars.

Three or four train men, in liveries, stood, cap in hand, upon the little platform, to assist the party up the steps. The first car was named SADIE. Its exterior adornments rich, yet not gaudy, did not escape attention. But it was on entering that exclamations of delight and surprise knew no bounds.

"We need not have entered by the kitchen-door," explained Tom, "but since we have, you ladies can ask any questions that you please of those white-aproned cooks and waiters."

Which indeed they proceeded to do with feminine delight. It was found that meals could be served of a character equal to the accustomed home table, which was, of course, of the utmost luxury.

"This is such a lovely dining-room," exclaimed Sadie, tripping into the next apartment and seating herself at the foot of the table in one of the great leather chairs. "Tom, is this dinner-set your selection? It is in exquisite taste. And the silver all marked! Let's read the monogram. 'S. S. R. C.' Now translate it, please, you rogue."

"'Sadie Seacomb's Railway Carriage.' Isn't that plain?" answered Tom. "And what do you think of the carpet?"

They all confessed that its soft texture and fine blending of colors were perfection. The room was finished in oak. Mirrors on either side, full-panel, deceived the eye with the apparent expanse of a noble apartment.

"See! In this room, as in all others, electric bells communicate with cook, porter, conductor, or engineer."

Tom pointed out the row of white knobs in the dining-room, variously marked.

"What! can we stop anywhere we please?"

"I should hope so," replied Tom, "provided you keep to the right of way given you. Now this, in the center of this car, is the drawing-room, of course. I know not where finer carpets can be found than these—they were imported. That figure of a horse in full run may not be a lady's fancy, but it is my old favorite, Breeze, who once saved my life."

"Splendid, Tom! It could not be better. Why, she once nearly outran a train on this very road for you, dear boy."

"These tiger-skin rugs are from Brazil!" Tom went on. "We are lighted all through by gas carried under the car—the only thing I don't really like—but it's all right so long as we stay on the track."

The party spread themselves about the gorgeous room, filled with every elegance which lavish wealth could afford. Rare fresco was inwrought upon ceiling and partition representing scenes in Tom's life. The old red school-house where he learned his letters; the almshouse of which he was an inmate; the sublime snow-peaks of the Andes; the palace of Dom Pedro, emperor. Mirrors extended from floor to ceiling. Broad windows opened out on the lawns and flower-gardens of Lakeside.

"I really don't know just why I put this piano in here," said Tom. "It is an upright, you see, and occupies little space. It may serve to while away tedious hours in some waiting, or when at rest we entertain our friends."

Bessie Ketridge promptly sat down before it and proved its sweetness of tone. But the company were too eager to explore the rest of these rooms of magic wonder to tarry for music.

"This is a sleeping-room," Tom begun to explain.

"Indeed! Are you sure?" laughingly shouted Tom's wife, who was by this time in full romp of frolic and delight. "What else could it be? It is as complete as any in our own home. Not a shelf like sleeping-car horrors, but a real wide bed, covered with silk spread and on a real bed-spread! Oh, wonder! wonder!"

"There are three like this in the two cars," Tom explained, "besides 'shelves' as you call them, for ten or fifteen persons more. When we take our party to California——"

"California! Can we go anywhere we please?"

"Certainly, if we pay for the use of a road, which I propose to do when I travel."

"That's right, my boy, that's right!" stammered out Tom's father. "Do not go rolling about the country at the expense of stockholders who have no right thus to give away the use of their roads. I'm glad you built these cars with your own money."

"I think," Tom went on to show, "that if you draw these curtains so, and shut this door so, you could lay yourself down at full length on that bed, mother, and sleep as cosily as in a chamber at Lakeside."

"Yes, yes, my son. Truly you are a wonderful boy, my Tom!" answered the old lady.

The next car was named the Dom Pedro II. It was quite similar to the first, except instead of the kitchen and dining-room a large library occupied the first half of the structure. Books were shelved about, writing-

table and desk stood in center and side. Easy-chairs, paper-racks and lounge filled up the appointments.

"I intend this car rather more for my own use, as I shall have to be moving over the road a great deal. But you see that transit from one car to the other is very easy."

And, indeed, side-wings so protected the platforms that a lady would not fear to pass if the train was in rapid motion.

"There is a smoking-room. Beyond are sleeping-rooms," added Tom.

"What can you want of a telegraph instrument here in this corner, Tom?" queried his beautiful wife, as she leaned over his shoulder while he sat at his desk.

"This? I shall have an operator always here. By a simple invention of my own he can make connection with the wires along the line at any point where we come to a halt; say midway between stations. We can then direct as to our intended movements, secure right of way, or communicate anything we please with the great world not on wheels like ourselves. Your conductor can do this for you when you are traveling alone."

"Oh, let's start for—for South America!" gayly shouted the young wife.

"Indeed, I hope to see the time that we can do that very thing," answered Tom. "For instance, from here to Mexico; from thence along the Isthmus, over the mountains, and down the valley of the grandest river in the world."

---

There remains little more for the writer of this narrative to record at this time. In deeds of unselfish devo-

tion to the good of their fellow-men this happy pair lived among the people, who cherished them with warmest affection.

It was while he was yet a young man—indeed younger than any of his predecessors in that high office—that Thomas Seacomb was elected governor of his native State. As he ascended the long flight of marble steps that lead to the capitol building on the hill, in Montpelier, to take the oath of office, he could not help turning about and looking back. The honorable gentleman at his side promptly asked:

“What is it, your excellency?” thinking that something necessary to the ceremonial had been neglected. “Have you forgotten something?”

“I have forgotten nothing,” answered Tom, as his eye wandered far over the little city of his toils, and the places of his once temporary yet undeserved disgrace. “I remember everything! And I thank God.”

The escort little understood the deep meaning which lay beneath his words.

The young governor caught the eyes of his fond wife and her father, his parents and sister, and Charley Ketridge at her side. The vast crowd cheered. He began his inaugural, and with it a noble work in his dear old State of green mountains. To be true to God and to sacrifice for others are stepping stones to honor.

A brave show was that, when at the end of the indoor ceremony, the Honorable Thomas Seacomb descended and took the bridle of his old horse Breeze from Bill Krank's hand, to head the procession, which, with bands and soldiery, and abundant civil display, marched through the city streets. The mare bore her master well and proudly, though more than twenty years of age; but she

was nowadays lapped in luxury, as it were. Tom's boyish vow to ride her on this day was fulfilled. The procession moved to an open field, where Tom and Charley Ketrige were that day to throw open a State hospital, which their united wealth had enabled them to erect and present to their fellow-men. The reader will remember that Tom's promise to Charley Ketrige had been that he should "share and share alike" with himself in the fruits of his Amazon expedition, to embark in which he had helped his friend. Their South American business had now assumed vast proportions. Together they had founded this noble charity. The surgeon in charge was no other than our old acquaintance, Mr. Bourne, Tom's companion across the Andes, long since a physician of rising fame.

THE END.



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